

## Models of Political Competence

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# Models of Political Competence

The Evolution of Political Norms in the Works of Burgundian  
and Habsburg Court Historians, c. 1470–1700

*by*

Maria Golubeva



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*For Diana Ieleja*



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## INTRODUCTION

With a few exceptions, the history of political ideas in the West has tended to focus on a relatively limited series of texts generated by prominent writers whose work is supposed to have been more innovative than run-of-the-mill treatises by less daring contemporaries. The history of ideas systematically privileges contributions by individuals, and relegates texts generated by collectivities (such as the court of Burgundy) or institutions (such as regional Estates) to a marginal position. In as much as official historians, such as Chastelain or Molinet in the fifteenth century or Vernulaeus in the seventeenth century, strove to conform, in their texts, to the public function with which they were invested by their monarchs, their works automatically constitute objects of lesser interest to a modern historian of ideas than the 'spontaneous' contributions of writers such as Machiavelli or Philippe de Commynes, who are believed to have maintained a critical distance in their analysis of politics. While the study of deliberations of early political institutions, such as councils and Estates, has sometimes been undertaken in order to produce a more contextual interpretation of the ideas of some great thinker, the study of such documents as repositories of ideas *in their own right* is a more recent trend, exemplified by some works cited in this book.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, however, 'institutional' texts, including official histories of European ruling dynasties, have not been regarded as worthy of special attention from historians of ideas.

There are several good reasons to doubt the soundness of that approach. The first is that the mere fact that a text has been produced in order to justify institutional or dynastic interests does not automatically mean that the text will be conservative in terms of the ideas that it articulates. Arjo Vanderjagt has shown how the ideological discourses reproduced by the court of Burgundy at the time of Charles the Bold and Guillaume Hugonet echoed the trends of Renaissance civic humanism.<sup>2</sup> In that way they were

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Jan Dumolyn, 'Privileges and novelties: the political discourse of the Flemish cities and rural districts in their negotiations with the dukes of Burgundy (1348–1506)', *Urban History*, 35 (1), (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Arjo J. Vanderjagt, '*Qui sa vertu anoblist*'. *The Concepts of Noblesse and Chose Publique in Burgundian Political Thought* (Groningen, 1981); Arjo J. Vanderjagt, 'Expropriating the past. Tradition and innovation in the use of texts in fifteenth-century Burgundy', in: Rudolf

no farther removed from the beginnings of modernity than were the individual impressions of politics articulated later by Commynes. The second reason to pay more attention to policy-related texts produced within political institutions is the tendency of institutionally generated texts to take greater notice of the structures and societal contexts in which political ideas were supposed to operate. Corporate actors of the fifteenth-century political stage (and their chronicler contemporaries, on whose texts this study is based) knew how to articulate their awareness of the complexity of local, regional and dynastic political interests. In sharp contrast to them, more innovative diplomats such as Commynes and, indeed, Machiavelli, sometimes reduced the complexity of politics to the interplay of individual characters, discarding as possibly boring for their readers the complex institutional contexts that were, for them, self-evident—but within which their contemporaries' understanding of political success and failure operated.

The work of official historians, on the other hand, contains frequent references to the institutional complexity of the pre-modern and early modern power structures, often expressed by presenting the processes of political communication to the reader's eye. Such is Molinet's description of the apology of the Four Members of Flanders to Maximilian I after the Bruges captivity, and such are the uniformly tedious descriptions of rituals surrounding combat in the memoirs of Olivier de La Marche. The former shows in some depth how the complex political interaction between regional institutions at various levels could be structured. The latter reveals the structures of communication of the power elite of a diverse ensemble of lands ruled by the dukes of Burgundy, which was in the process of becoming an early modern state—even though eventually it was divided between several other states. It is exactly the court historians' attachment to institutional narratives, expressed not only through political documents but also through accounts of symbolic interaction, which should make official histories interesting to a contemporary student of the history of political thought seeking a more 'grounded' reading of political ideas.

*The Object of Research*

The object of this study is the changing model of political competence in the official histories of European rulers of one dynasty from the late fifteenth to the early eighteenth century.

Better-known theories of political competence, such as that of Bourdieu, do not engage with political competence historically: they limit their definitions of it to the modern age. In Bourdieu's approach, political competence is inextricably interwoven with the presumption that politics is a professional field: '[T]he political field is the site in which, though the competition between the agents involved in it, political products, issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events are created.'<sup>3</sup> Political competence is, then, cultural capital in the field of politics, and by definition, an ordinary citizen has less of it than a professional politician. But can the same be said of a period when politics was not yet a mass market? Some historians have effectively extended a Bourdieu-esque understanding of competence to the later medieval period: Jacques Verger and Jan Dumolyn have argued that late medieval officers of princely administrations also acted as exponents of a specialised discourse of politics that they themselves developed and from which their decisions proceeded.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, today, political competence is not seen as an exclusive domain of politicians. Members of professional and business communities are sometimes ascribed their own special kind of political competence, relevant for the interaction between their professional field and the field of general politics.<sup>5</sup> And, at least at the ideal level, citizenship education in developed democratic societies is supposed to endow every citizen with a modicum of political competence. While historians tend to agree that in the late medieval and early modern period the political field was more limited,<sup>6</sup> nevertheless some groups of subjects, notably the

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), pp. 171–2.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Verger, *Les gens de savoir en Europe à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1997); Jan Dumolyn, 'Justice, Equity and Common Good. The State Ideology of the Councillors of the Burgundian Dukes', in: D'Arcy J. D. Boulton and Jan R. Veenstra (eds.), *The Ideology of Burgundy*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 145 (Leiden/Boston, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Joanne Rains Warner, 'A Phenomenological Approach to Political Competence: Stories of Nurse Activists', *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice*, 4 (2), (2003), pp. 135–143.

<sup>6</sup> Though not as limited as had once been postulated by Jürgen Habermas in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1989). For the best-known critique of Habermas on this point, see Andreas Gestrich, *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit. Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1994).

urban and regional elites embodied in territorial Estates, possessed their own competence for engaging in the political field.<sup>7</sup>

A question that may legitimately be posed at this stage is whether 'political competence' is not an artificial or anachronistic concept when applied to the political communities and the hereditary rulers of late medieval and early modern Europe. After all, competence may prove yet another of those 'universalist and essentialist concepts of political actions and institutions that set themselves above history', making impossible a proper reconstruction of the discourses and practices which would allow us to see the meaning-making structures of past societies.<sup>8</sup> Is competence merely a badly fitting modern term for other concepts in force at the time, for instance, 'virtue' (and its derivatives) or 'honour'?

The answer lies, perhaps, in comparing what virtue and honour denoted for West European societies during the period in question, and what competence denotes in the discourses of politics of the modern age. First of all, it can be argued that semantically, neither 'virtue', nor, indeed, the Renaissance concept of *virtù* were a full equivalent of capacity to achieve political success. Quentin Skinner comes close to equating *virtù* in the works of Machiavelli with capacity to achieve success in government, especially in his recent shorter restatement of the concept.<sup>9</sup> But, at an earlier point Skinner makes clear that the Renaissance republican concept of *virtù* means primarily 'a broad sense of public commitment'.<sup>10</sup> Both *virtù* and honour could be seen primarily as public emanations of moral superiority (and only proceeding from that, as something to which noble and exalted personages had a special claim).<sup>11</sup> Neither is an equivalent of the modern

<sup>7</sup> Jean Nicolas, Julio Valdeon Baroque, and Sergij Vilfan 'The Monarchic State and Resistance in Spain, France and the Old Provinces of the Habsburgs, 1400–1800', in Peter Blickle (ed.), *Resistance, Representation and Community, The Origins of the Modern State in Europe* (Oxford, 1997), p. 113; Dumolyn, 'Justice, Equity and Common Good' (see n. 4), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen?', in: B. Stollberg-Rilinger (ed.), *Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen* (Berlin, 2008) p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2000), p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols., (Cambridge, 1978), ii, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> For a profound analysis of the notions of virtue, nobility and honour in the fifteenth-century Burgundian context, see Vanderjagt, '*Qui sa vertu anoblist*' (see n. 2). For notions of honour in the early modern period and their implications for the process of state-building, see Ronald G. Asch, 'Honour in All Parts of Europe Will be Ever Like Itself'. Ehre, adlige Standeskultur und Staatsbildung in England und Frankreich im späten 16. und 17. Jahrhundert: Disziplinierung oder Aushandeln von Statusansprüchen?, in: Ronald G. Asch, Dagmar Freist (eds.), *Staatsbildung als kultureller Prozess* (Cologne, 2005), pp. 353–380.

notion of competence, since competence, in our understanding today, denotes qualities necessary in order to achieve something,<sup>12</sup> whereas virtue, *virtù* and honour were seen as important per se.<sup>13</sup> Let us look at some examples to illustrate the point.

Around 1465, the Burgundian courtier Jean de Lannoy, writing instructions to his son on the matter of family honour, says: '... He who is just, is loved; who is loved, has friends; who has friends, is praised; who is praised, is honoured; who is honoured, is served and commended by all men, who pray for him, by which he comes to peace, joy and honour in this world, and acquires good fame after his death, and hope to arrive at true eternal glory.'<sup>14</sup> The virtue of justice, here, is seen primarily as a vehicle to achieve honour and salvation, though success in earthly affairs may also come from it. A little earlier in the same text, in accordance with the Renaissance concepts of nobility, Lannoy connects virtue and the right to govern: 'without it (virtue) no one can be held to be noble... nor worthy of lordship, or of governing anything'.<sup>15</sup> Virtue, then, ensures that one is eligible to rule—but it does not guarantee success in doing so. At best, it is a synonym of moral competence.

Two hundred years later, the Habsburg court historian Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato writes about Oliver Cromwell: 'And let it be noted from his extraordinary example, that not the nobility of birth, nor riches... qualify one for high office, as it usually solely happens, but that it is opportunity that... wakes up the spirit, and sharpens the mind.'<sup>16</sup> There is not a word here about virtue or, indeed, honour—yet certain mental qualities are believed to qualify a man for political office and political success. The fact that Priorato later piously adds a sentence concerning the nothingness to

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<sup>12</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, competence is 'Sufficiency of qualification; capacity to deal adequately with a subject' (OED, Second Edition, 1989, 'Competence', 4.a.).

<sup>13</sup> The notion of virtue in itself possessed several levels of meaning in accordance with the late medieval taxonomy of virtues that distinguished between theological and civic virtues. This distinction was operationalised through the Renaissance concept of nobility of spirit as a primary quality that made one eligible for political office. Arjo Vanderjagt, '*Qui sa vertu anoblist*' (see n. 2), pp. 64–8.

<sup>14</sup> Translated from 'Lettres envoyés par Jehan seigneur de Lannoy a Loys son filz', quoted in Bernhard Sterchi, 'The Importance of Reputation in the Theory and Practice of Burgundian Chivalry: Jean de Lannoy, the Croÿs, and the Order of the Golden Fleece', in Boulton and Veenstra (eds.) *The Ideology of Burgundy* (see n. 4), p. 103.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101, Footnote 12.

<sup>16</sup> Translated from Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Vite et azioni di personaggi militari, e politici*, 2nd edn. (Vienna, 1674), p. 245.

which Cromwell's glory came after his death does not change much in the way of perception of political competence that he ascribes to Cromwell.

While admittedly anachronistic, this little comparison has its benefits. It shows that if we ask the question "Which approaches to statecraft were viewed as successful, and what qualities were ascribed to political actors who applied, or failed to apply, those approaches?" we must cast our net wider and search historical sources for notions that go beyond the conventional parlance of virtue and honour. Other notions beside these contributed to the narrative of competence.

Was there a need for such a narrative? As pointed out by Andreas Gestrich, also in the days when theories of sacred nature of monarchy still ensured general public acceptance of the principle of hereditary personal rule, this did not diminish the need for the rulers to make efforts to demonstrate the conformity of their actions to accepted norms—that is, to demonstrate that their actions were directed towards common good. The issue of trust, as Gestrich puts it, depends on knowing something about the one who is to be trusted, and it is here that one finds the need for detailed information about the actions, aims or competence of the ruler and/or his advisers.<sup>17</sup> In other words, success in ruling is always defined by the 'terms of reference' that a given society provides. Thus, while a proof of successful economic policy was not always required by the audiences for which court historians were producing their works in the fifteenth, sixteenth or seventeenth century, a proof of prudent and effective military leadership was desirable, and so, after the 1520s, was a proof of the confessional soundness of a prince's policies.

In order to confirm or reconstruct these terms of reference, official histories, along with other texts, provided their readers (and the rulers who often commissioned them) with models of political competence. These were not the same thing as exempla<sup>18</sup> (though they may have made ample use of exempla). Models of political competence in the context of this study can be defined as normative models of practical statecraft which are used as reference in narratives of political events (in texts that are not

<sup>17</sup> Andreas Gestrich, *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit* (see n. 6), pp. 26–7.

<sup>18</sup> The easiest definition of an exemplum can be found in Franz Bücher, *Verargumentierte Geschichte. Exempla Romana im politischen Diskurs der späten römischen Republik*, Hermes Einzelschriften 96 (Stuttgart, 2006), p. 154: An exemplum is 'was aus der Vergangenheit, zum Zwecke gegenwärtiger Überzeugungsarbeit eines Redners herausgenommen wird'—thus making any example from the past used for rhetorical purposes an exemplum.



primarily preoccupied with creating ideal models as such). Their function is twofold: to bind the rulers and the ruled to a certain understanding of what in modern terms can be described as competent political action, and to persuade diverse audiences that the ruler in question corresponds to the given understanding of competence. It is this second function that places them outside the domain of political philosophy and more or less inside the domain of what Jan Dumolyn (after Charles Taylor) has called ‘middlebrow ideology’: a discourse of the principal actors in the nascent modern state.<sup>19</sup>

It is not by chance that this study looks to works of history produced by official historians or by historians working at court to shed light on the contemporary understanding of political competence. The authorship of late medieval and early modern discourses of politics and the state was, of course, collective, and one could easily include several overlapping classes of individuals among those who shaped the models of political competence. Jacques Verger, updating the studies on the ‘intellectuals of the Middle Ages’, was the first to introduce the Gramscian term of ‘organic intellectuals’ into discussion of the forms of knowledge and conceptual frameworks shared by educated servants of the state in late medieval and early modern Europe.<sup>20</sup> Later Jan Dumolyn pointed out, quite rightly, that superior officers of state administrations before 1500 already made their decisions in conformity with a certain abstract discourse of the state and politics.<sup>21</sup> Such organic intellectuals were the authors of contemporary models of political competence, shaping the understanding of commonwealth and statecraft in late medieval and early modern states. Or rather, as Dumolyn puts it, ‘Armed with old theories the officers constructed a new kind of state and a new sort of society’.<sup>22</sup>

Official historians, thus, are not the only ‘suspects’ whose works may be studied in search of the models in question. Yet it was they who showed those models in action—that is, set in contemporary social contexts, challenged by the realities of politics, and under stress. Even the most archetypal histories wrought with clichés borrowed from classical authors have something to say about the political problems of the period they describe, and on the manner in which those problems were solved. Besides, taking

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<sup>19</sup> Jan Dumolyn, ‘Justice, Equity and Common Good.’ (see n. 4), p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Verger, *Les gens de savoir* (see n. 4), pp. 128–9.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Dumolyn, ‘Justice, Equity and the Common Good’ (see n. 4), pp. 17–18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

into account the changing nature of political communication between the 1470s and the 1700s (the period covered, although with a long break between c. 1530 and c. 1640, by the history texts analysed for the present study), it can be argued that no other category of sources offers a more solid basis for tracing the changing model of political competence than do the works of official historiography, as a fairly conservative genre.

Narratives of competence are narratives of success and failure, involving a certain interpretation of the given political circumstances. Since court historians needed to prove that the rulers they served were competent and successful in a particular given context, they had to go at least a little into the nitty-gritty of government and war, in order to prove their point.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the narratives of success and failure often involved a certain interpretation of political virtue, and a certain normative understanding of politics. For instance, while for the chancellor of Emperor Charles V, Mercurino of Gattinara, writing in the 1520s, competent political action primarily included serving the Catholic Church,<sup>24</sup> Protestant historian Gottlieb Eucharius Rinck two centuries later envisaged competent political action that was above confessional loyalty.<sup>25</sup> Proceeding from this distinction, one can see that these respective models of political competence stress different qualities or indeed different kinds of competence—for Gattinara, confessional competence is the primary pre-requisite of political success, while for Rinck, a competent leader can be either Catholic or Protestant, but should always possess other sets of attitudes and skills that Rinck himself deems essential.

### *The Choice of Historical Period and Scope of the Study*

This study began as an endeavour to identify models of secular political competence in the official representation of early modern rulers shortly before the legitimacy of monarchs came to be tested by the ideas that

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<sup>23</sup> This is not true of the type of dynastic histories constructed entirely around generic exempla (like the works of Vernulaeus, analysed in Chapter III of this book). However, even in those works the way the exempla were arranged and introduced, as well as the emphasis on particular virtues, betrays the topical attitudes of the time when the history is written.

<sup>24</sup> A. Mercurino of Gattinara, *Memoirs*, ed. Ilse Kodek, *Der Großkanzler Kaiser Karls V. zieht Bilanz. Die Autobiographie Mercurino Gattinaras aus dem Lateinischen übersetzt* (Münster, 2004), pp. 198–9.

<sup>25</sup> Gottlieb Eucharius Rinck, *Leopolds des Grossen . . . wunderwürdiges Leben und Thaten*, 3rd edn., 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1713).

gained currency during the Enlightenment. The purpose was to see how, if at all, the competence to rule was discursively separated from moral and religious legitimacy in the texts presenting the actions of early modern rulers for various audiences. The initial choice to focus on the Austrian Habsburgs, however, presented this author with a problem. The Habsburg Monarchy in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was not exactly a hub of political or intellectual innovation in Europe. The essence of a Habsburg emperor's task c. 1700 was described by the dynasty's apologists, whether secular or religious, as a permanent endeavour to preserve the *status quo*—both at home in Austria and in the Empire.<sup>26</sup> This did not preclude change: in the face of current political needs, new political solutions were sought for and implemented. Nevertheless, official narratives from which we can glean some references concerning the contemporary understanding of successful (competent) or less successful (incompetent) handling of political affairs avoided engaging with the notion of change. Or, at least, they did not engage with change as a fundamental category of social and political reality.

The seemingly conservative nature of the texts presenting the actions of the Austrian Habsburgs and their officials to various audiences in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century means, among other things, that these texts rely heavily on dynastic exempla. These exempla are often derived from the works of court historians and other intellectuals that served earlier generations of the dynasty, and thus create an illusion of perfect continuity. The message, however, differs considerably according to the political context of a given reign, as does the discursive framework within which the stereotypical dynastic virtues are discussed.<sup>27</sup> The illusion of continuity remains exactly that—an illusion. A new approach, when expedient, could ultimately be presented as established and traditional.<sup>28</sup> Only a careful analysis taking into account the earlier texts of the same dynastic tradition and the texts that influenced that tradition can reveal the change.

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<sup>26</sup> Robert A. Kann, *A Study in Austrian Intellectual History. From Late Baroque to Romanticism* (London, 1960), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> See especially Jutta Schumann, *Die andere Sonne. Kaiserbild und Medienstrategien im Zeitalter Leopolds I* (Berlin 2004).

<sup>28</sup> On a similar phenomenon in the political discourse of late medieval urban communities in the Burgundian Netherlands, see Jan Dumolyn, 'Privileges and novelties: the political discourse of the Flemish cities and rural districts in their negotiations with the dukes of Burgundy' (see n. 1).

A longitudinal analysis of the models of political competence deployed in court historiography, which this study attempts to undertake, seems therefore a more appropriate solution. The extension of the scope of enquiry back as far as the days of the Habsburg-Burgundian dynastic alliance allows one to see in perspective the evolution of the 'traditional' Habsburg model of political competence. It allows, above all, to comprehend the changing nature of this model, vacillating, within the space of 200 years, between a concept of political competence that was predominantly secular and a concept that entirely subjugates politics to confessional concerns.

What results is, of course, not a study in the intellectual history of any given country. The dynasty's universal claims and cosmopolitan character, reflected in the culture of the court, implies that texts written in different parts of Europe and in different languages fall within the category of 'official historiography' of the dynasty. This broadens the field of inquiry, but also allows one to hope that some conclusions from this study may be relevant in the general context of the history of European political culture and ideas.

### *The Sources*

The main type of text studied here is a history written by the dynasty's servants or supporters, usually with the approval of the court, between c. 1470 and c. 1710. Defining the borders of this category of sources is not as simple as it might seem. While this study leaves the theoretical arguments over defining the subtle distinction between a chronicle and a history to those who choose to indulge in them, there is of course no clear, uninterrupted line of official court histories of the dynasty during the entire period. While for the time around 1500, one can still follow the work of the parallel sets of Burgundian-Netherlandish and German historiographers (and in fact, a comparison of the ways in which the same political actions are evaluated by, say, Molinet and Grünpeck may be of some value for this study), the choice of sources becomes excruciatingly difficult from the time of Charles V. Charles had many official and quasi-official historiographers in the many states where he reigned.<sup>29</sup> The decision to use

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<sup>29</sup> Apart from the probably best-known history of Luis Avila y Zuñiga in Spanish (*Comentario de la Guerra de Alemaña*, first published 1548), there was the Flemish official historian Guillaume Van Maele, possibly charged at some point with editing the memoirs

the memoirs of Mercurino of Gattinara, who was not a historiographer, but an active politician and Charles's chancellor, is based on the role that Gattinara's normative vision may have played,<sup>30</sup> and on the fact that his interpretation of the ruler's and his own moral competence provides an example *par excellence* of the new confessional vision of politics, which departs sharply from the earlier Habsburg and Burgundian tradition.

Most categories of texts dealing with political issues, from sermons to public speeches to manuals on the education of princes, underwent a serious evolution during the period covered by this study, and so did histories written for the rulers or under their auspices. The rise of the printing press introducing the broadsheet and pamphlet polemic, and the arrival of the periodical press transformed political communication. Yet official histories, on the whole, seem to have kept their core function unchanged: they had, whatever their other implications, to contextualise the narratives of the rulers' moral and political competence. In this they were somewhat related to 'mirrors of princes' or *Fürstenspiegel*: some recent studies show that it would be wrong to assume that 'mirrors of princes' were static repositories of clichés regarding the art of ruling—on the contrary, works of this tradition are often found to contain a specific contemporary agenda.<sup>31</sup>

The ways in which the narratives of political competence were contextualised were, of course, subject to evolution. Around 1500, arguments about the uses of *historia* named two more or less articulated and discrete purposes: as a collection of exempla for use in moral teaching and as an arsenal of rules for those engaged in politics.<sup>32</sup> Later, especially in the Holy Roman Empire, one can witness the development of so-called 'pragmatic history' that documents political events without necessarily making an explicit claim to moralise or educate.<sup>33</sup> Even this, however, could be

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of Charles V, and several others. On Van Male, see Joseph-Marie Kervin de Lettenhove (ed.), *Commentaires de Charles Quint* (Brussels, 1862), pp. xi–xix.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., John M. Headley, 'Germany, the Empire and Monarchia in the Thought and Policy of Gattinara', in Heinrich Lutz (ed.), *Das römisch-deutsche Reich im politischen system Karls V.* (Munich and Vienna, 1982), pp. 15–33.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> See Gregor Mueller, *Bildung und Erziehung im Humanismus der italienischen Renaissance*, (Wiesbaden 1969), p. 384 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Leonard Krieger in his essay on history and political culture in early modern Germany speaks of 'pragmatic history', consisting of the description of official acts. Leonard Krieger, 'Germany', in: Orest Ranum (ed.), *National Consciousness, History, and Political Culture in Early-Modern Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1975), p. 73.

written with the primary purpose of soliciting what Andreas Gestrich calls 'trust' for political actors.

The period following the Reformation, marked by a process of structural change that accorded to religion a central role in the functioning of political and social institutions (the process known in German historiography as 'confessionalisation')<sup>34</sup> is not covered in the present study, as much has been published already on the model of political competence described as 'Catholic statecraft' by Robert Bireley and others.<sup>35</sup> Recent research shows that the real effect of the confessional political norm on practical politics was more limited than believed earlier,<sup>36</sup> however, that does not diminish the importance of the normative model as such—and evidence suggests that there indeed existed, in the era of Counter-Reformation, an ideal Habsburg model of statecraft that was fiercely confessional.<sup>37</sup> This study concerns itself primarily with the fundamentally different, secular model of political competence that had been practically eclipsed in official Habsburg historiography between c. 1530 and c. 1670, as the chapter on the confessional model of political competence, comparing the basic premises expounded by Gattinara in 1529 and by Vernulaeus a hundred years later, attempts to demonstrate. The return of the secular approach to politics is then traced in the works of the court historian Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, whose histories of Ferdinands II and III, and especially that of the first part of the reign of Leopold I, present an alternative vision of political competence largely devoid of confessional rancour. The work of the Protestant Eucharius Gottlieb Rinck, not a court historian but a pro-imperial historian whose work was implicitly supported by the court of Vienna, is analysed as an exponent of the new form of the secular model of political competence, inspired by the ideas of Christian Thomasius.

Other sources were used to recreate the discursive and ideological background and to provide context for the interpretation of official histories.

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<sup>34</sup> On the political and cultural processes of 'Konfessionalisierung' in the sixteenth century, see especially the articles of Wolfgang Reinhard and Luise Schorn-Schütte in: Joachim Bahlke, Arno Strohmeyer (eds.), *Konfessionalisierung in Ostmitteleuropa: Wirkungen der religiösen Wandels in Staat, Gesellschaft und Kultur* (Stuttgart, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Robert Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince: anti-Machiavellianism or Catholic statecraft in early modern Europe* (Chapel Hill and London, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> Christoph Kampmann, 'Peace impossible? The Holy Roman Empire and the European State system in the 17th century', in: Olaf Asbach and Peter Schroder (eds.), *War, the State and International Law in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (London, 2010), pp. 197–211.

<sup>37</sup> See also Konrad Repgen (ed.), *Das Herrscherbild im 17. Jahrhundert*, Schriftenreihe der Vereinigung zur Erforschung der Neueren Geschichte, 19 (Münster, 1991).

These included, but were not limited to, funerary sermons, speeches addressed to various assemblies, mirrors of princes and political treatises.

### *The Method*

Politics is, among other things, the interaction of various interests in society. These interests may have varying degrees of articulation and institutionalisation. Their interaction is conditioned by certain power relations. While it was not a widely held view in early modern Europe that politics is a process of influencing the allocation of scarce resources, one can nevertheless see in the stories of success and failure told by official historians a certain judgement about political actors' ability to replenish and preserve limited resources, such as tax money, loyalty of subjects and peace.

This admittedly broad definition of politics provides the theoretical background for textual analysis of official histories in the present study. Since this is not an enquiry into the history of states or institutions *per se*, but rather a study of political ideas contained in works of historiography, it will look for the ways in which the writers of official histories represented the actions of rulers vis-à-vis other important actors, institutional, collective and individual. Sometimes official historians evaluated these actions as competent (successful and constructive for the common good), or incompetent (unsuccessful and destructive).

The main questions with which official histories and other histories written under the broadly defined patronage of the dynasty are approached in this work can be formulated in the following way: What actions of rulers and their advisers or officers, in the political field, were interpreted as successful and why? What types of competence (meaning capacity or ability) were viewed as important? What were the strategies used for describing actions viewed as less successful and how (if at all) was success or failure attributed to the efficiency of political actors (as distinct from, say, the role of Providence in arranging earthly affairs)?

To the extent that it is possible, the following analysis shares the basic premises of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the premise that through discourse, social actors constitute objects of knowledge, social roles, as well as relations between different social groups. This study also views discursive acts as largely responsible for the construction of particular social and political conditions, as official histories, like any other text endowed with public credibility and produced by those in



authority, 'can contribute to the restoration, legitimation or revitalisation of a social status quo'.<sup>38</sup> Discourse analysis becomes critical when it examines the relationship between language and power, especially focusing on the texts created by those in power or by representatives of elites.<sup>39</sup> The texts analysed here fall entirely into this category, therefore it makes sense to trace the use of specific argumentation strategies by their authors, who were faced with the task of integrating the actions of specific individual or corporate actors into the narratives of common good.

The narratives of official chronicles and histories are structured around events, yet they also contain evaluative passages summarising the characters and most notable acts of some political actors. Chastelain's famous summary of the 'magnificences' of Charles the Bold, later reproduced by Molinet in his chronicle, is an example of such an evaluative passage. One can therefore speak of two types of settings for conveying the message of political competence: *action setting* and *evaluation setting*. Both of these types of setting have undergone considerable evolution with the development of historiography during the period in question. Whether *evaluation setting* in the context of court historiography inevitably produces a panegyric of the ruling monarch or his ancestors, remains to be seen.

In the *action setting*, the questions that the present study addresses in order to grasp the official and quasi-official historiographer's understanding of political competence are the following:

- Who are the main political actors (including institutional and 'collective' actors) and how are their actions characterised?
- In what relation does their action stand towards the public good<sup>40</sup> (supporting, undermining, restoring)?
- What strategies does the writer use to indicate that they were successful or that they failed?

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<sup>38</sup> Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cilia, Martin Reisigl and Karin Liebhardt, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Teun A. Van Dijk, 'Principles of critical discourse analysis', *Discourse and Society*, 4 (2), (1993).

<sup>40</sup> The public good is one of the few concepts of the time that remains present in official texts throughout the period in question, albeit the wording changes slightly. For a concise treatment of the notion of public good during the late medieval period, see Winfried Eberhard, 'Gemeiner Nutzen' als oppositionelle Leitvorstellung im Spätmittelalter, in M. Gerwing and G. Ruppert (eds.), *Renovatio et Reformatio: wider das Bild von 'finsternen' Mittelalter* (Münster, 1985), pp. 195–214. For a lengthier study of the concept, see P. Hübner, *Utilitas Publica—Gemeiner Nutz—Gemeinwohl* (Frankfurt, 1991).



In the *evaluation setting*, the question is more straightforward: what actions and qualities of political actors are summarised, and how are they evaluated?

It is quite important to keep in mind that the very fact that certain actions or qualities are mentioned, while others are omitted, may be significant for understanding the model of political competence that a given text constructs. It is not by chance that when Olivier de La Marche summarises the achievements of Philip the Good, he pays no attention to individual religious practices, while for any number of Habsburg historians around 1640 the personal devotion of Ferdinand II is a crucial proof of his political astuteness. On the other hand, the ability to deal with complex constellations of discrete political interests inside the community and to strike compromises, described by Molinet when dealing with the misfortunes of Maximilian I in the Netherlands, is absent from the list of requisite qualifications for a Habsburg ruler in the seventeenth century, as witnessed by the history of the Hungarian rebellion by Gualdo Priorato. The models of competence were adjusted according to the development of political institutions and the accompanying ideal models of statecraft.

### *The State of Research*

The study of past political ideas is more often concerned with high political theory than with 'middlebrow ideology'. While studies looking into normative political models are numerous, the studies tracing such models in the works of historians are relatively scarce. Luckily, there is a category of studies in between these two groups, looking at the way normative political ideas were discussed, received and transformed in the political contexts of late medieval and early modern courts. For the first part of the period covered here, the works of Arjo Vanderjagt and Jan Dumolyn were a major inspiration behind this study. Beginning with Vanderjagt's seminal dissertation on the concepts of *noblesse* and *chose publique* in Burgundian political thought,<sup>41</sup> and continuing with a number of articles on the political discourse of princes, officials and burghers in the Burgundian Netherlands,<sup>42</sup> both scholars set an excellent example of how political

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<sup>41</sup> Vanderjagt, '*Qui sa vertu anoblist*' (see n. 2).

<sup>42</sup> Arjo Vanderjagt, 'Expropriating the past' (see n. 2); Jan Dumolyn, 'Justice, Equity and Common Good' (see n. 4); Jan Dumolyn, 'Privileges and novelties: the political discourse of the Flemish cities' (see n. 1).

documents not purporting to deal with political theory can be studied as evidence of the ‘applied’ or practical facets of political ideology in a late medieval context. Many references to the findings of Vanderjagt and Dumolyn are interspersed in the first chapters of this study, discussing the models of political competence in official histories c. 1470–1510. The ideological background behind political actions during the same period is further explored by Peter Arnade and Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin,<sup>43</sup> and the social context of politics in the Burgundian Netherlands has been recently described by Marc Boone<sup>44</sup> and by Andrew Brown and Graeme Small.<sup>45</sup> The culture of historiography at the court of Burgundy has been addressed most recently by Frederik Buylaert and Jan Dumolyn.<sup>46</sup>

A very different example of a study of political ideas in the Burgundian context—and more specifically in the context of historiography—is presented by the work of Michael Zingel on the representations of France, Burgundy and the Empire in the texts of Burgundian historians.<sup>47</sup> Very little engagement with political theory is evident in Zingel’s study: it merely transposes the traditional vision of high politics as a field of diplomacy and war on to a survey of the historians’ lives and creative output, without questioning the assumptions of traditional political history about what constitutes the essence of politics. At the other end of the spectrum, Anthea Bischoff’s study of the cultural aspects of elite-forming education at the court of Burgundy engages with the texts of better-known historiographers from the positions of cultural history and gender studies, without looking into political discourses or, indeed, any kind of political life.<sup>48</sup>

For the reigns of Maximilian I and Charles V, there are a number of studies of political ideology. Excluding the sweeping studies of the imperial idea (there are many, but they are not for the most part related

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual. Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent*, (Ithaca and London, 1996); Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des ceremonies. Essai sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons* (Turnhout, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> Marc Boone, *A la recherche d’une modernité civique. La société urbaine des anciens-Pays-Bas au bas Moyen-Age*, (Brussels, 2010), pp. 57–78.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Brown and Graeme Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries, c. 1420–1530* (Manchester, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Frederik Buylaert and Jan Dumolyn, ‘Shaping and reshaping the concepts of nobility and chivalry in Froissart and the Burgundian chroniclers’, *The Fifteenth Century* (2010), pp. 59–83.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Zingel, *Frankreich, das Reich, und Burgund im Urteil der burgundischen Historiographie* (Sigmaringen, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> Anthea Bischoff, *Erziehung zur Männlichkeit. Hofkarriere im Burgund des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Ostfildern, 2008).

directly to the subject of political competence),<sup>49</sup> one is left with the more matter-of-fact research on the discourse of imperial proclamations and other political documents. For Maximilian, the articles of Manfred Hollegger and Christina Lutter, published in one volume, display a direct link between practical politics and ideology.<sup>50</sup> Hermann Wiessflecker's opinion<sup>51</sup> on the role that the Burgundian model had played in Maximilian's self-representation is critiqued in the section of this book dealing with the differences between the Burgundian model and the model developed by Maximilian's historiography. For Charles V and his Chancellor Gattinara (whose memoirs are included among the texts analysed in this book), a number of excellent studies on the linkages between ideological discourses and policy exist, not least the works of John M. Headley<sup>52</sup> and the article by Geoffrey Parker.<sup>53</sup>

Among the many books dealing with the more or less political aspects of intellectual life in the lands governed by the Habsburgs during the Renaissance and Reformation, some have provided particularly helpful insights for my study of the texts of dynastic history. Jan-Dirk Müller's *Gedechtnus* is a seminal work on the literary output of Maximilian's court and perhaps the most profound study on the subject to date, and as such it contains valuable findings also on the ideological aspects of the aesthetic of ruling promoted by Maximilian and his circle.<sup>54</sup> Wilhelm Ribhegge's study of the political aspects of the *Institutio principis christiani* provided a helpful if

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<sup>49</sup> The best-known ones published in English are probably Frances A. Yates, *Astraea. The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1975) and Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas. The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> Manfred Hollegger, 'Erwachen und aufstehen als ein starker stryter. Zu Formen und Inhalt der Propaganda Maximilians I.', in Karel Hruza (ed.), *Propaganda, Kommunikation und Öffentlichkeit, 11.–16. Jahrhundert*, Vorschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 6 (Vienna, 2002). Christina Lutter, "'An das Volk von Venedig'", Propaganda Maximilians I. in Venedig, in Karel Hruza (ed.), *Propaganda, Kommunikation und Öffentlichkeit, 11.–16. Jahrhundert*, Vorschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 6 (Vienna, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Hermann Wiessflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I. Das Reich, Österreich und Europa and der Wende zur Neuzeit*, 5 vols. (Vienna/Munich, 1971–1986).

<sup>52</sup> John M. Headley, 'Germany, the Empire and Monarchia in the Thought and Policy of Gattinara' (see n. 30) and John M. Headley, *The Emperor and His Chancellor. A Study of the Imperial Chancellery Under Gattinara* (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>53</sup> Geoffrey Parker, 'Die politische Welt Karls V.', in: Hugo Soly (ed.), *Karl V. und seine Zeit* (Cologne, 2000), pp. 113–225.

<sup>54</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller, *Gedechtnus. Literatur und Hofgesellschaft um Maximilian I* (Munich, 1982).

unduly optimistic evaluation of the ideal model of political competence promoted by Erasmus.<sup>55</sup>

For the period of confessional politics covering the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century, particularly in the Habsburg domains, the studies of Robert Bireley come closest to describing the normative model of statecraft as defined by the neo-clerical officialdom of the age.<sup>56</sup> Bireley's analysis is grounded in a good knowledge of Neostoical literature and therefore presents an informed picture of the normative model constructed by the pro-Habsburg Catholic followers of Lipsius. The annotated edition of the Habsburg handbook to government from the time of Ferdinand II, *Princeps in Compendio*, by Franz Bosbach is also very useful for a student of the Habsburg idea of political competence in the era of Counter-Reformation.<sup>57</sup>

Veronika Oberparleiter's study of the Habsburg histories of Nicolaus Vernulaeus, an official historiographer from the first half of the seventeenth century, provides informative background for further research into his work but does not engage directly with his political ideas.<sup>58</sup> Among the studies of Habsburg historiography of the second part of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the works of Arno Strohmeyer<sup>59</sup> and Thomas Brockmann<sup>60</sup> provide interesting debating points, while the classical study of Anna Coreth on Austrian historiography in the age of baroque still remains a useful reference book for the period.<sup>61</sup> Brockmann's study especially suffers from leaving out the Italian-language court historiography of the period, thus making the analysis of the tendencies he discusses

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<sup>55</sup> Wilhelm Ribhegge, 'Erasmus von Rotterdam und der burgundische Hof', in Chantal Grell, Werner Paravicini and Jürgen Voss (eds.), *Les princes et l'histoire du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Bonn, 1998).

<sup>56</sup> Robert Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince* (see n. 35).

<sup>57</sup> *Princeps in compendio*, ed. by Franz Bosbach in: Repgen (ed.), *Das Herrscherbild im 17. Jahrhundert* (see n. 37), pp. 79–114.

<sup>58</sup> Veronika Oberparleiter, 'Nicolaus Vernulaeus' Darstellung der Habsburger: Apologia, Virtutes und Historia Austriaca, mit einem Exkurs über die Methodus legendi historiarum in: *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 56, (2008).

<sup>59</sup> Arno Strohmeyer, 'Geschichtsbilder in Kulturtransfer: die höfische Historiographie in Wien als Rezipient und Multiplikator', in: Andrea Langer and Georg Michels (eds.), *Metropolen und Kulturtransfer in Ostmitteleuropa*, (Stuttgart, 2000).

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Brockmann, 'Das Bild des Hauses Habsburg in der dynastienahen Historiographie um 1700', in Christoph Kampmann, Katharina Krause, Eva-Bettina Krems, Anuschka Tischer (eds.), *Bourbon, Habsburg, Oranien. Konkurrierende Modelle im dynastischen Europa um 1700* (Cologne, 2008), pp. 27–57.

<sup>61</sup> Anna Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca* (Munich, 1959), recently published also in English translation (Purdue University Press, 2004).

rather incomplete, especially in view of the fact that both Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato and Giovanni Battista Comazzi were also authors of normative works on government and politics. The present study attempts to fill the lacuna, especially concerning Priorato's political ideas and their reflection in his Habsburg histories. Similarly, Brockmann pays little or no attention to the history of Leopold I by Gottlieb Eucharius Rinck, which, although not written at court, represents an important work of pro-Habsburg historiography within the Empire. An examination of Rinck's model of political competence as projected on Leopold I and an assessment of Rinck's political ideas and his reliance on the theories of Christian Thomasius conclude the present study of the models of political competence in dynastic historiography.

The study begins and ends with the claim that during certain periods in the history of the dynasty, a fairly secular model of political competence was developed by dynastic historians. In the texts produced at the court of the dukes of Burgundy (Chapters I and II), this model was closely linked to the medieval ideal of common good and left the issues of individual Christian faith (not to be confused with public religious practices) on the margins of political discourse. This secular model, as Chapter III explains, was totally eclipsed in dynastic historiography by a model of confessional political competence developed at the time of Mercurino of Gattinara. That model lasted well into the later seventeenth century, until, after a prolonged period of intense confessional strife, a new secular model of competence came into being, based on the premise of strong princely rule. The later examples of Habsburg dynastic historiography, this study argues in Chapters IV and V, were secular in principle if not in spirit.



## CHAPTER ONE

### MILITARY, INSTITUTIONAL AND DISCURSIVE COMPETENCE AS SEEN BY BURGUNDIAN COURT HISTORIANS, C. 1470–C. 1500

When Olivier de La Marche penned what was to become for the following generations the most widely read work of Burgundian court literature, *Le chevalier délibéré*, his theme was the transient nature of earthly life and not at all politics.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the long poem about the ageing narrator's encounter with mortality contains numerous references to aspects of political success. In the Cemetery of Fresh Memory, the knight sees many graves of his contemporaries who were once deemed great. Their greatness, for the most part, came from noble status and military honour, but not exclusively. Some of them had been high functionaries of the ducal administration and distinguished themselves by competent management of affairs of state and by their charitable foundations.<sup>2</sup> Others were brilliant financiers, which allowed them to rest entombed cheek by jowl with kings and dukes of their time.<sup>3</sup> In the Cemetery of Fresh Memory, La Marche assembles the collective model of political competence of his age.

#### *Intellectual Context: The Ideal Model of Good Governance in the Burgundian Netherlands*

The teleological view of history as a process of formation and development of nation-states, which, despite multiple critiques, continues to shape much of the output of contemporary historical research, has always endorsed the view that the short-lived rise of Burgundy as a European

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<sup>1</sup> On the literary and cultural significance of *Le chevalier délibéré*, see Susie Sutch, 'La réception du *Chevalier délibéré* d'Olivier de La Marche au XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Moyen français*, 57–58, 2006, pp. 335–350.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. the description of the 'tomb' of Chancellor Rolin: '*Je rencontray en mon chemin/ Ung cercueil de grant artifice/ Ou fut le chancelier Rolin/ Son tiltre qui fut en latin/ Le monstroït parfait en justice/ Sumptueulx fut en edifice/ Hospitaulx & moustiers fonda...*'. Olivier de La Marche, *Le chevalier délibéré*, Part III (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/24320/24320-8.txt>, last visited 10.10.2008).

<sup>3</sup> Those were Cosimo de Medici and Jacques Coeur. Ibid.

power came to an end in 1477, with the death of Charles the Bold.<sup>4</sup> That school of thought also postulated that the dukes of Burgundy had failed to develop a unified national consciousness in their lands, and that the attempts of some Burgundian functionaries and writers to provide Charles the Bold with an ideology that would emancipate him as a sovereign in his own right remained of little consequence. This approach truncated the development of Burgundian ideology of sovereignty by drawing the balance not later than 1477, relegated some important texts produced after this date to the role of sentimental afterthoughts on a bygone era, and discarded the intellectual heritage of Burgundian court functionaries as an example of an unsuccessful ideology of nation building.<sup>5</sup>

Another approach, represented above all by recent works of intellectual history produced in Belgium, the Netherlands and elsewhere, offers a re-evaluation of the political ideas generated in the Burgundian-Netherlandish milieu. It stresses the innovative potential of the institutional and political thought of the ducal functionaries,<sup>6</sup> traces the incremental development of the Burgundian-Netherlandish political elite through interactions of the court and civic society,<sup>7</sup> and detects a strain of nascent national consciousness or at least a sense of distinct 'Burgundian' political identity initiated by the ducal ideology in the Low Countries.<sup>8</sup> For this school of thought, 1477 is not the year of great rupture. The big change comes earlier, with the decisive break away from a concept of Burgundy as a spin-off of French royal house to a self-sufficient concept of sovereignty endorsed by Charles the Bold and his higher officers in the 1470ies. The development

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Vaughan, in *Charles the Bold: the Last Valois Duke of Burgundy* (London, 1973) represents this point of view par excellence.

<sup>5</sup> This view is endorsed in the standard works of Richard Vaughan on the Valois dukes of Burgundy and in his other works, e.g. Richard Vaughan, 'Hue de Lannoy and the Question of the Burgundian State', in: R. Schneider (ed.), *Das spätmittelalterliche Königtum im europäischen Vergleich* (Sigmaringen, 1987), p. 336: 'Of course, this was no incipient national consciousness; just a hotch-potch of myths'. For a more recent reiteration of this view, see Michael Zingel, *Frankreich, das Reich, und Burgund im Urteil der burgundischen Historiographie* (Sigmaringen, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Arjo J. Vanderjagt, 'Qui sa vertu anoblist'. *The Concepts of Noblesse and Chose Publique in Burgundian Political Thought* (Groningen, 1981); Jan Dumolyn, 'Justice, Equity and Common Good. The State Ideology of the Councillors of the Burgundian Dukes', in: D'Arcy, J. D. Boulton and Jan R. Veenstra (eds.), *The Ideology of Burgundy*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 145 (Leiden/Boston, 2006), pp. 1–20.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Brown and Graeme Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries, c. 1420–1530* (Manchester, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Jan R. Veenstra, '"Le prince qui se vult faire de nouvel roy": the Literature and Ideology of Burgundian Self-Determination', in: Boulton and Veenstra, *The Ideology of Burgundy* (see n. 6).



goes on after 1477, as most institutions in the Burgundian Netherlands continue their existence—and that means that they still require a mode of institutional political thinking to justify their functioning.<sup>9</sup> The change of dynasty, from the Valois to the Habsburgs, is of less significance when viewed from this perspective: the Burgundian Netherlands around 1500 remain Burgundian (in their political heritage) and Netherlandish (in their cultural identity grounded in the economic development of the Low Countries).

Before looking at the way political competence was discussed in the works of court historiography in the Burgundian Netherlands in the 1470s and 80s, it is important to highlight here the conclusions drawn from the current state of research on the political ideology of the dukes of Burgundy. The existence of a more or less coherent ideology underpinning the functioning of ducal government and of the institutions that it brought about has been postulated by a number of studies.<sup>10</sup> Several historians in recent decades,<sup>11</sup> inspired by the heritage of Johan Huizinga who first made Burgundian court ceremonial a symbol of late medieval culture,<sup>12</sup> have concentrated on the communicative aspect of Burgundian political ideology, primarily on public rituals that externalised that ideology and communicated it to the urban elites that paid for the dukes' government and wars. Of main interest for the present inquiry is a different set of studies, concentrating on the intellectual content of Burgundian political ideology—particularly the conclusions of Jan Dumolyn concerning its institutional nature,<sup>13</sup> and of Arjo Vanderjagt concerning its secular nature.<sup>14</sup> As Vanderjagt puts it, in the Burgundian Netherlands, 'The

<sup>9</sup> This can be seen, for example, in Lisa Maria van Hijum, *Grenzen aan macht. Aspecten van politieke ideologie aan de hoven van Bourgondische en Bourgondisch-Habsburgse machthebbers tussen 1450 en 1555* (Enschede, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> See especially the articles of Dumolyn and Vanderjagt (see n. 6 and n. 14), as well as the articles of Bernhard Sterchi, David J. Wrisley, and Jan R. Veenstra in: Boulton and Veenstra, *The Ideology of Burgundy* (see n. 6).

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual. Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent*, (Ithaca and London, 1996); Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des ceremonies. Essai sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons* (Turnhout, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* (1921), published in English as *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Jan Dumolyn, 'Justice, Equity and Common Good' (see n. 6), pp. 1–20.

<sup>14</sup> Arjo Vanderjagt, 'Expropriating the past. Tradition and innovation in the use of texts in fifteenth-century Burgundy', in: Rudolf Suntrup and Jan R. Veenstra (eds.), *Tradition and Innovation in an Era of Change, Medieval to Early Modern Culture*, Vol. I (Frankfurt, 2001), esp. pp. 191–4.

state is secular in the first place and in practice, because in contrast to the spiritual *civitas Dei* it is primarily material and not at all concerned with the internal religious qualities which men might have. Its task is to protect and to help men in their external practical affairs regardless of their internal belief and desires.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the absence of references to the Church as a vehicle ensuring equitable and salutary government of earthly affairs, and the insistence on that role being performed by the prince. Other historians have presented the relation between religious ideals and the ideal of princely government in the Burgundian state as less tenuous: thus, Catherine Emerson places one of the key texts representing Burgundian political world to future generations, the *Mémoires* of Olivier de La Marche, firmly within the theological contexts of his time.<sup>16</sup>

There is no need to see Vanderjagt's and Emerson's estimates of the role of theological contexts for Burgundian political doctrine as contradictory. The wealth of normative models of virtuous government (biblical, classical and medieval), available to the Burgundian court functionaries in the fifteenth century, allowed them to interpret the central principles of politics in a number of ways, but always to the benefit of the dynasty. As Vanderjagt repeatedly points out, traditional authorities, be they Christian or pagan, were interpreted strictly in accordance with the ideas and interests of the dukes of Burgundy and their environment.<sup>17</sup> The purpose of political literature (and histories and memoirs can be certainly included under that rubric) was to justify political conduct as much as to prescribe it. Moreover, the growing importance of re-discovered pagan authors seriously influenced the hierarchy of virtues necessary for successful statecraft. As Vanderjagt shows, the intellectual culture of Burgundian court officials in the fifteenth century developed under the influence of Italian civic humanism, and accorded a central role to the 'pagan' cardinal virtues, primarily to the virtue of justice understood in the minimal sense (not the divinely inspired '*vero iustitia*' of *civitas Dei*). This left Christian virtues, such as love and faith, to individuals engaged in pursuit of salvation, and thus out of the scope of primary concerns of statesmen.<sup>18</sup> Better government could be achieved only by a better application of the cardinal virtue of justice, combined with fortitude and magnanimity. This concept

<sup>15</sup> Arjo Vanderjagt, *Qui Sa Vertu Anoblist* (see n. 6), p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Emerson, *Olivier de La Marche and the Rhetoric of 15th-Century Hagiography*, (Woodbridge, 2004), especially pp. 127–131 and 164–188.

<sup>17</sup> Vanderjagt, 'Expropriating the past' (see n. 14).

<sup>18</sup> Vanderjagt, *Qui Sa Vertu Anoblist* (see n. 6), pp. 36–41 and 45–59.

of political virtues, related in Vanderjagt's opinion to St. Augustin's sceptical vision of the *civitas terrena*, rather limits the role of religion in the running of political affairs and can therefore be called secular.

The institutional origins of the Burgundian ideology of government can be interpreted wider than Jan Dumolyn does it when he traces the institutional self-awareness of higher officials back to their education and their striving for social prestige.<sup>19</sup> The very nature of the policy process in the Burgundian state called for some kind of operational ideology. A key role in the acquisition of monetary resources for the ducal administration (without which there could be no success in government or war) was played by negotiations with representative assemblies of an increasingly complex and culturally diverse ensemble of lands. As new territories were acquired (through inheritance, war, or both), their elites and their political institutions were integrated—through a process of accommodation rather than unification—into the developing Burgundian state.<sup>20</sup> This implied a need for a correspondingly complex yet increasingly unified institutional culture that expressed itself through a common political discourse. The evidence of such a common discourse, grounded in the widespread medieval topos of common good and shared in equal measure by the ducal officials and by the burghers of Flemish cities, is discussed by Dumolyn in a more recent study.<sup>21</sup> The normative ideas of good government expressed by different and sometimes mutually hostile actors in practice were becoming increasingly convergent.

Another source of the secular ideology of politics was the reception of classical texts translated and edited to fit the ideological and institutional needs of ducal government. As a result of a creative appropriation of a number of works of classical and medieval political theory, remarkably, Cicero's *De Officiis*, an indigenous political doctrine was developed in the

<sup>19</sup> In Dumolyn, 'Justice, Equity and Common Good' (see n. 6).

<sup>20</sup> The best description of this process in English can be still found in Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good*, 2nd edn. (London, 2002). A more recent analysis by Jan Dumolyn reveals a regional social network of officers serving the Burgundian state—Jan Dumolyn, 'Nobles, Patricians and Officers: The Making of a Regional Political Elite in Late Medieval Flanders', *Journal of Social History*—Volume 40, Number 2, 2006, pp. 431–452. The social mechanisms that formed this network are somewhat revealed in Werner Paravicini, *Invitations au mariage: pratique sociale, abus de pouvoir, intérêt de l'état à la cour des ducs de Bourgogne 1399–1489*, (Stuttgart, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Jan Dumolyn, 'Privileges and novelties: the political discourse of the Flemish cities and rural districts in their negotiations with the dukes of Burgundy (1348–1506)', *Urban History*, 35 (1), 2008.

Burgundian Netherlands.<sup>22</sup> This ideology, grounded in civic humanism, transplanted into the French vernacular by the translators of Aurispa and Buonaccorso,<sup>23</sup> ascribed a particular virtue (*vertu de humanité*) to the duke in managing the affairs of the *chose publique* without the supervision of the Church.<sup>24</sup> One could claim that *vertu de humanité* stands for moral competence in human affairs: a competence that according to the ideal vision of Burgundian high functionaries such as Guillaume Hugonet, chancellor to Charles the Bold, manifested itself through legitimate and equitable government.

The much-quoted address of Chancellor Hugonet to the Estates-General, pronounced in January 1473,<sup>25</sup> implies that secular history was seen as a vehicle for bringing about the fruition of legitimate and competent government, creating conditions for economic prosperity and wellbeing of the subjects. In the address, Hugonet dwells on the benefits of the rule of princes as compared to other forms of government:

... experience shows that many provinces and cities not governed by one ruler are consequently wrought with discord, partialities and vacillations without rest, and provinces and cities governed by one prince rejoice in concord, flourish by justice and are full of good. But, without looking for foreign experience, the lands and countries that I have named, that you inhabit, according to the ancient and true division of the Gaul are called the Belgian Gaul, much praised for its force and prowess by Caesar in his Commentaries, which lands were so abundant in people that they sent against Caesar, as he tells us, two hundred ninety-six thousand combatants. Nevertheless, because they were under different popular governments (*policies*), without order, without discipline or single obedience, Caesar defeated and overcame them very easily. And since later all these lands had been subjected to the regime and government of princes, dukes and counts, of whom our most redoubtable and sovereign lord is the true, rightful and natural heir and successor, the lands have acquired form, were improved and enlarged with good and large cities, more numerous than in other countries, with handsome fortified towns and fortresses, with many churches, cathedrals, monasteries and other colleges, with the flower of chivalry and nobility, and

<sup>22</sup> Vanderjagt, 'Expropriating the past' (see n. 14), pp. 186–7.

<sup>23</sup> Vanderjagt, *Qui Sa Vertu Anoblist* (see n. 6), Chapter II.

<sup>24</sup> Vanderjagt, 'Expropriating the past,' pp. 191–4.

<sup>25</sup> On Hugonet and his intellectual world, see Anke and Werner Paravicini, 'L'arsenal intellectuel d'un homme de pouvoir. Les livres de Guillaume Hugonet, chancelier de Bourgogne', in: D. Boutet and J. Verger (eds.), *Penser le pouvoir au Moyen Âge VIII<sup>e</sup>–XV siècles* (Paris, 2000), pp. 261–325.

unequalled traffic of commerce (*merchandise*) of which at the time of popular government, as Caesar recounts, there was no sign...<sup>26</sup>

As with other ideas developed by Burgundian high officials, the underlying assumption that a great wealth in a political community is a sign of its special merit can be probably traced back to the influence of Florentine civic humanism.<sup>27</sup> What Hugonet seems to propose is a certain view of history as a process bringing about an improvement in governance and commerce, through the ubiquitous vehicle of the dynasty. Arjo Vanderjagt has been the first to point out that this view is far from the aspect of the Augustinian tradition in political thought which sees wickedness prevail in human communities unless visited by special grace,<sup>28</sup> and equally far from the influential doctrine of Giles of Rome, who believed that the power of the Church, keeping human beings beholden to the universal Christian community, stands above the prince as the source of justice.<sup>29</sup> History, in this quotation, involves a certain fulfilment and abundance under human government, provided that the form of government is right, the ruling prince is competent or wise (*saïge*) and his dynasty has arrived to power by legitimate means (*sans violence ou tyrannie aucune*). For Hugonet, in the context of the history of the Low Countries, modern forms of government are preferable to ancient ones, and the combination of just government with dutiful and industrious subjects gives every reason for optimism. Of both the prince and the subjects, he expects that they hold fast to common interests, cherishing no other thing dearer than 'the growth or improvement of honour, authority, lordship and power' that pertains equally to the *chose publique* and the prince.<sup>30</sup> The interests of the subjects are thus effectively subsumed under *chose publique*,

<sup>26</sup> Translated from Hugonet, 'Proposition faite a Brouxelles par le Chancelier de Bourgogne messire Guillaume Hugonet, en presence du duc Charles, pour avoir 600 mille escus', in: Joseph Cuvelier (ed.), *Actes des Etats Généraux des anciens Pays-Bas I* (Brussels, 1948), pp. 179–80.

<sup>27</sup> Quentin Skinner, discussing Florentine civic humanists, writes of 'civic humanists' assumption that the great wealth of the city should be treated as a token of its special excellence'. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1978) 2 vols., ii, p. 162.

<sup>28</sup> For Vanderjagt's initial discussion of Burgundian secular state ideology in relation to the concept of minimalist justice as opposed to 'true' or divine justice in Augustine, see Vanderjagt, *Qui Sa Vertu Anoblist* (see n. 6), pp. 45–53. On the reception of political ideas of St. Augustine in medieval Europe and on Giles of Rome (as well as other political doctrines of the Middle Ages) see Anthony Black, *Political Thought in Europe 1250–1450* (Cambridge, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Vanderjagt, 'Expropriating the past' (see n. 14), p. 190.

<sup>30</sup> Hugonet, 'Proposition faite a Brouxelles...' (see n. 26), p. 181.

while those of the prince remain distinct (even though identical in purpose). Nevertheless, one could disagree with Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin who claims that within the framework of politics offered by Hugonet, the role of the members of community in affairs of state is reduced to docile allegiance.<sup>31</sup> It is an active affirmation of the unity of *chose publique* and the prince that Hugonet solicits from his audience (requiring them to vote an *aide* of 600 thousand for the military expenses of his lord). At least at the discursive level, the continuation of the happy history of the community, brought about by unity under one dynasty and by the legitimacy, justice and *sagesse* of princes, depends on the goodwill of the prince and the subjects alike.

The works of Burgundian court historiography of that period shared the same discursive framework, heavily emphasising the objective of maintaining the *bien publique*. It has been pointed out before that the official ducal historian Chastelain refers to *bien publique* as the main benchmark by which the actions of princes are measured.<sup>32</sup> The same can be said for his successor Molinet: from the first lines of the first prologue to his *Chronique*, he casts the dukes of Burgundy and their administrative officers in the role of leaders (*conducteurs*) of the *chose publique* and recurrently states the preservation of the *bien publique* as the major purpose of their actions.<sup>33</sup> This trend in Burgundian historiography is particularly well articulated in the texts produced by ducal historians in and after the 1470s. That is no mere coincidence: the decade saw the severance of last ties between Burgundy and France and the end of that long-suffering political creed that obliged Burgundian writers to represent their princes primarily as worthy offspring of the French royal house and foremost peers of France.<sup>34</sup> The change in self-representation was not limited to the new claims of full sovereignty articulated by Charles the Bold. Also the

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<sup>31</sup> Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des ceremonies. Essai sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons* (Turnhout, 2004), p. 57.

<sup>32</sup> Dumolyn, 'Justice, Equity and the Common Good' (see n. 6), p. 5, footnote 23.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Molinet, *Chroniques*, ed. Georges Doutrepont and Omer Jodogne (Brussels, 1935), 3 vols., I, pp. 25, 29, 208, etc.

<sup>34</sup> Signs of this change are evident not only in dynastic historiography, but also in dynastic hagiography of the period: see Graeme Small, 'Of Burgundian Dukes, Counts, Saints and Kings', in: Boulton and Veenstra, *The Ideology of Burgundy* (see n. 6), pp. 151–187. On the other hand, Jan Veenstra suggests that the definitive rupture with French royal ideology and the creation of distinct Burgundian ideology began with earlier chronicles focused on the murders of Louis of Orleans and John the Fearless. Jan R. Veenstra, 'Le prince qui se veut faire de nouvel roy': the Literature and Ideology of Burgundian Self-Determination, in: Boulton and Veenstra, *The Ideology of Burgundy*, pp. 204–7.

perception of history of the political community and the dynasty was subject to change. George Chastelain<sup>35</sup> was appointed to the post of historian by Philip the Good in 1455 (in 1473 the name of his office was changed to *indiciaire*). In his work, compared to earlier chronicles, official Burgundian history acquires a greater depth of reflection on conflicting political interests. Awareness of the complexity of individual, dynastic and institutional interests at play in the world of high politics is fully present in the chronicles of Chastelain and Molinet. The same can be said of the memoirs of Olivier de La Marche.<sup>36</sup> It has been proposed that this change comes from the willingness of the later writers to accept Burgundian alliances with England as part of dynastic policy and from the fact that they were sometimes writing with the benefit of hindsight, at a later date when the house of Austria had taken over the Netherlands.<sup>37</sup> There is no need to go deeper into that point here; in any case, the following analysis proceeds from a different perspective, focusing on the social and discursive features of political ideology as manifested by court historiography in the Burgundian Netherlands.

*Common Denominators: Military, Institutional and Discursive Competence*

It has been noted quite justly that the rhetoric of common good had become an ideological commonplace in the later Middle Ages and one can find its evidence virtually everywhere, frequently in texts produced by social and political actors in bitter opposition to each other.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, when grounded in a concrete body of documents produced during a given period, the rhetoric of common good can be sometimes 'decoded' and reduced to a more concrete meaning. Jan Dumolyn has shown recently that in the political discourse of the Four Members of Flanders in the

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<sup>35</sup> This spelling of his name, rather than Georges Chastelain, was common during his lifetime, and more recently resumed by British historians—see Graeme Small, *George Chastelain and the Shaping of Valois Burgundy: Political and Historical Culture at Court in the 15th Century* (London, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> Even Michael Zingel, whose view of the quality of historical reflection in Burgundian historiography on the whole is extremely sceptical, sometimes feels obliged to make exceptions for these later authors. Zingel *Frankreich, das Reich und Burgund* (see n. 5), pp. 233–4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Winfried Eberhard, 'Gemeiner Nutzen' als oppositionelle Leitvorstellung in Spätmittelalter', in M. Gerwing and G. Ruppert (eds.), *Renovatio et Reformatio: wider das Bild von 'finsternen' Mittelalter* (Münster, 1985), pp. 195–214.



fifteenth century, common good was largely made up of two concomitant concepts—‘trade’ and ‘peace’.<sup>39</sup> Since politics is a process of influencing the allocation of scarce resources, it is understandable that the urban and rural communities of Flanders wished to maximise their access to free trade but to limit that of their neighbours. They also wanted peace and justice, although their understanding of both often differed from that of some ducal officials, and they complained that some actions of their sovereigns undermined the desired order.<sup>40</sup> In other words, trade and peace were desired but scarce commodities and their distribution to the perceived benefit of the common good was the core of the model of political competence for the burghers of Flanders.

What was, then, at the core of political competence for the princes and their officers, as seen through the eyes of official historiographers? This chapter attempts to trace the common features of political discourse related to success and failure in government in the works of history written in the Burgundian Netherlands in the last three decades of the fifteenth and the first decade of the sixteenth century. The analysis concerns primarily the French texts of George Chastelain, Jean Molinet and Olivier de La Marche, with some references to their contemporaries such as Philippe de Commines and Jacques du Clercq, who were informed about political events at court but maintained a certain distance in their memoirs.

### *Military Competence*

Broadly speaking, the need to maintain peace was central also to the traditional functions of the prince, especially in the context of protecting his lands and upholding justice. In the texts generated in court milieus, the competence to maintain peace acquires, as could be expected, a distinctly different twist, compared to the concerns of peace and trade as articulated by Flemish urban elites. Princely competence to maintain peace can be more or less easily subsumed under two keywords: ‘war’ and ‘justice’, with the former dominating the discourse of the chronicles and memoirs. According to a late fourteenth-century traditional text enumerating the rights and obligations of a duke of Burgundy, the duke was expected to ‘guard the peace of the land’ and ‘to govern the people by the rod of

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<sup>39</sup> Jan Dumolyn, ‘Privileges and novelties: the political discourse of the Flemish cities and rural districts in their negotiations with the dukes of Burgundy (1348–1506)’, *Urban History*, 35, 1 (2008), pp. 5–23.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.



justice'.<sup>41</sup> The texts of fifteenth-century Burgundian court historians suggest that this core concept survived intact beyond 1477, but acquired diverse and subtle articulation through the institutional discourses that evolved together with the increasing complexity of governance.

While virtually all authors of chronicles written at the court of Burgundy around 1470 and in the following decades, display some understanding of and interest in military matters, their judgement of military competence of important personages appearing in their narratives is often ambiguous. Epithets denoting military competence could be used both to flatter and to castigate. For Molinet, a cleric whose descriptions of military matters probably relied substantially on the accounts of others, Charles the Bold is 'well endowed for war' ('*du tout adonné à la guerre*') and that is a good thing,<sup>42</sup> but Molinet describes the people of Neuss, whom he calls arrogant and quarrelsome, with the same epithet: the city is '*hutineuse, arrogante, espineuse et adonnée à la guerre*'.<sup>43</sup> Even La Marche, who is generally fond of scenes of combat, feels the need to justify Charles's passion for war. In his view, the duke had a good reason to like war: if he wanted to conquer or take over his neighbours' lands, it was for his zeal in the service of the Christian faith, because he wanted to lead others in it, and would never consent to be anyone's subject: '*desiroit de se faire si grand & si puyssant, qu'il peut estre conducteur, & meneur des autres (car à nulluy ne vouloit estre subject)*'.<sup>44</sup> La Marche is not the only one to pay lip service to the connection between military zeal or chivalry on the one hand and piety on the other: Molinet does that too, in his second Prologue.<sup>45</sup> Neither of the two returns again to religious motivation in Charles's military effort, except when referring to the siege of Neuss, since it was undertaken on behalf of the Elector of Cologne, a prince of the Church.<sup>46</sup> Arjo Vanderjagt has noted before that in Burgundy, the connection between chivalry and

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<sup>41</sup> From the late fourteenth-century Burgundian coutumes, reproduced in Bertrand Schnerb, *L'Etat bourguignon, 1363-1477*, (Paris, 1999), p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> Molinet, *Chroniques* (see n. 33), I, p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 32-3.

<sup>44</sup> For the present analysis, 2 different editions of the *Les Mémoires de Messire Olivier de La Marche* have been used: 1) an earlier edition published by Hubert Antoine, *Imprimeur de La Cour*, Brussels, 1616 (further referred to in footnotes as La Marche/Antoine), supplied by its publisher with telling pro-Habsburg and anti-French commentaries on the margins, and 2) the standard edition by Henri Beaune and Jean d'Abraumont (Paris, 1883-88, 4 vols., further quoted as La Marche/Beaune and d'Abraumont). The passage quoted here is present in both. La Marche/Antoine, Introduction, p. 85.

<sup>45</sup> Molinet, *Chroniques* (see n. 33), II, p. 589.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 29.

religion was shallow, and discourses highlighting the inner spiritual side of chivalric virtue by authors such as Lull were relatively unpopular.<sup>47</sup> In accordance with this tendency, except for the second Prologue, Molinet does not dwell much on the hypothetical connection between Christian piety and military competence. Military prowess per se, on the other hand, is given permanent attention.

Despite being probably the least martial of Burgundian court historians, Molinet provides ample examples of how seriously military competence could be taken.<sup>48</sup> The same Second Prologue makes it clear that the virtues of chivalry are in fact more important in determining the status of a prince and of the lands he rules than his formal title.<sup>49</sup> One has to be careful not to interpret this idea too figuratively, as a mere reference to nobility of spirit or Christian zeal. In fact both the Latin quotation chosen to introduce this prologue (*Militia est vita hominis super terram*) and a reference to Rome's rise from a humble city after the decline of kingship to the summit of glory, contain direct references to fighting and military triumphs. The nitty-gritty of war, occasionally alchemised into the gold of allegory, is always present in Molinet's text.

Molinet sees the use of artillery and other military techniques and the ability to transform the physical environment to fit one's policy as a proof of the quasi-divine power of the duke of Burgundy: he admires the great change of local topography (diverting the course of rivers) caused by Charles the Bold at the siege of Neuss.<sup>50</sup> Successful recruitment of military troops is another aspect of Charles's accomplishments to which Molinet draws his readers' attention. He refers to competent recruitment of troops in order to highlight Charles's singularity as a military leader. As long as the duke is successful, general rules that regulate competent conduct of war for others do not apply to him: according to Molinet, while ancient authors do not recommend to employ mercenaries (a point vehemently articulated forty years later by Machiavelli), Charles can afford to ignore 'the commandments of philosophers', since heaven and earth favour him more than others.<sup>51</sup> He is, thus, temporarily acquitted of charges of folly on the grounds of recruiting Italian mercenaries to swell the ranks of his

<sup>47</sup> Vanderjagt, *Qui sa vertu anoblist* (see n. 6), p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> On Molinet, see Doutrepont and Jodogne (eds.), *Chronique* (see n. 33), III, and Zingel, *Frankreich, das Reich und Burgund* (see n. 5), pp. 164–8.

<sup>49</sup> Molinet, *Chronique* (see n. 33), II, p. 590. This is, among other things, yet another ploy to undermine the hierarchical subjection to France.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 61–2.

army at Neuss. In the long run, however, the decision proves disastrous, as the Italian mercenaries abandon the mines in their charge. The blame for the resulting failure is not placed at Charles's door by Molinet, who exonerates the duke in a typical case of what is known in discourse analysis as 'shift of blame' strategy: Charles is 'frustrated in his high enterprise, magnificently conducted until that day and miserably concluded by the idleness of weak hearts'.<sup>52</sup> On the whole, throughout most of his description of the siege of Neuss and of further military campaigns, with the important exception of Charles's last Swiss campaign and his demise at Nancy, Molinet maintains a remarkable optimism about the duke's military success. The same enthusiasm is later transferred to the person of Maximilian of Austria, whose victory at the battle of Guinegate (*Therouenne*) on 7 August 1479 Molinet describes in great detail.

Dynastic continuity is an important element in the acquisition of military competence. Dynastic examples serve to inform the right course of action in moments of crisis.<sup>53</sup> After the battle of Montleher, when Charles has doubts as to his military success, '*le grans, et les sages, et les plus gens de bien de son armee*' hold a council with him on a fallen tree trunk and tell him, how in his father's first battle (St Riqueur) Philip had at first lost, but then regained his advantage, and took some important French prisoners. Charles decides to remain in the field and to wait for the outcome of the battle.<sup>54</sup> As a result, he is later recognised as the winner—though not, as La Marche bitterly points out, by the French king's historians.

Military competence is, of course, not limited to princes. Molinet makes much of the courage of ducal captains (such as La Marche) but also of some commoners who distinguished themselves in defending the towns and fortresses assailed by the French after the death of Charles the Bold. La Marche frequently gives the names of knights and squires who 'acquitted themselves well' in military clashes—blending in elements of heraldic history in the form of accounts of who was knighted and who died in a given battle (but not to the extent of describing their colours as a heraldic historian would do).<sup>55</sup> Particularly successful military exploits

<sup>52</sup> '*frustré de sa haulte emprise magnifiquement conduite jusques à ce jour et miserablement finée par paresce des coeurs faillis*'. Ibid., I, p. 80.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g. the way Molinet makes use of the example of Philip the Good to show that the bellicose attitude of Charles the Bold vis-à-vis the emperor was unnecessary—this chapter, below.

<sup>54</sup> La Marche/Beaune and d'Abramont (see n. 44), III, p. 14.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. La Marche/Beaune and d'Abramont, III, pp. 11–2. On La Marche's account of Montleher as a case of heraldic history, see Emerson, *Olivier de La Marche* (see n. 16), p. 66.

by persons of lesser rank are in fact mentioned specially, perhaps because such extent of military prowess in commoners is found surprising. Thus, three different accounts of the battle of Montleher, not only that of La Marche but also those of Philippe de Commynes and Jean de Haynin, while diverging significantly in their evaluation of the competence or incompetence shown by military leaders (including Charles), are united by retelling the episode in which the count of Charolais is saved by his physician's son, whom La Marche and Haynin name as Robert Cotterel (Cottereau).<sup>56</sup> The man is subsequently knighted and set on a highly successful career path.<sup>57</sup> La Marche also chooses to use this episode to highlight Charles's perseverance—prior to Cotterel's interference, the count of Charolais was wounded by the French and threatened by death, should he not surrender. While Commynes, in line with his general scepticism about the personality of the future Charles the Bold (whose service he left for serving Louis XI), only mentions that after invitation to surrender, Charles 'continued defending himself', La Marche makes much of the fact that Charles chose to stay in the field to claim the victory, despite being wounded.<sup>58</sup>

It is easy to discard all of the above as mere clichés reproducing the widespread notions of chivalry current in the Burgundian society. This may be to some extent true; however, it is important to see the emphasis on military competence in discursive relation to the topos of good government constructed by the historians in question. The connection between the two is especially evident in the representation of episodes of military violence treated as disruptions of peace. While war was commonly viewed as a natural function of the noble estate and of the princes in the normative literature of the period, mirrors of princes such as the *Book of the Body Politic* by Christine de Pisan (an influential source of normative ideas in the Burgundian courtly milieu) made a sharp distinction between military courage necessary for the protection of lands and subjects and

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<sup>56</sup> Jean de Haynin, *Les Memoirs de Messire Jean, Seigneur de Haynin*, ed. by R. Chalon, 2 vols, Mons, Hoyois, 1842, I, p. 37; Philippe de Commynes, *Mémoires*, ed. by Duforest, Paris, Flammarion, 2007, p. 82.

<sup>57</sup> La Marche pays special attention also to Cotterel's career after this episode, pointing out how beneficial this act of bravery had been for his future. La Marche/Beaune and d'Abraumont (see n. 44), III, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, III, p. 13. In fact, Haynin's account is the one making the most of Charles's courage, because for him, the count's bravery caused the recovery of the Burgundian troops: 'La vaillantise dudict comte de Charrolois causa ce recouvrement, qui autrement avoit perdu celle journée', Haynin, *Mémoires* (see n. 56), I, p. 38.

the abuse of force and excessive violence exhibited by some nobles.<sup>59</sup> In line with this distinction, Burgundian court historians, too, indicated for their readers when they deemed an act of war unnecessary or too violent. The critique of excessive aggression as a sign of the prince's incompetence is particularly evident in the later part of the chronicle of George Chastelain.

At the time when Chancellor Hugonet was pleading with the Estates to recognise the beneficent effect of ducal government on the life of their community and to support the military exploits of Charles the Bold, a different opinion regarding the duke's capacity to uphold that happy state of affairs was already rampant in the Netherlands.<sup>60</sup> One finds its expression in the very text that should have served, theoretically, to assert the competence of the duke's rule. Beginning with 1468, the official ducal historiographer Georges Chastelain introduces in his chronicle the theme of moral imperfection of the new duke, which reaches its critical pitch in the early 1470s. While Michael Zingel in his studies of Burgundian historiography claims that Georges Chastelain and Jean Molinet, like other Burgundian chroniclers, were extremely partial to their rulers,<sup>61</sup> Chastelain's treatment of a number of episodes in the reign of Charles the Bold shows the opposite. Chastelain is well aware that his task is to rationalise the events he sees and to endow them with public meaning. Lack of sensitivity towards the need to make his narrative reliable cannot be imputed to him.<sup>62</sup> As an official chronicler, caring for his reputation, he is eager to point out that whenever he describes the failings of his prince, he does so in order not to appear a liar and a flatterer.<sup>63</sup> The failings of which Chastelain, true to his earlier promise to criticise his masters if necessary, accuses Charles, are many. They begin with seemingly innocent character traits such as

<sup>59</sup> Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the Body Politic* (ed. Kate Langdon Forhan), Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 16–17.

<sup>60</sup> See the evidence of the critique of Charles's fiscal policies by his Dutch subjects in Richard Vaughan, *Charles the Bold* (London, 1973), p. 410.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Zingel, 'Les princes et l'histoire. L'exemple des ducs Valois de Bourgogne', in Chantal Grell, Werner Paravicini and Jürgen Voss (eds.), *Les princes et l'histoire du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Bonn, 1998), p. 210.

<sup>62</sup> In fact, as Jean Claude Delclos rightly points out, Chastelain is more obsessed with protestations of objectivity than any other chronicler of his time, and takes no exception when judging the deeds of princes, be they even his own masters. Delclos, *Le Témoignage de Georges Chastelain* (Geneva, 1980), pp. 4–12 and 186–201.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, George Chastelain, *Chronique* in *Oeuvres historiques inédites de sire George Chastelain* (Paris, 1837) p. 448, referring to the personality traits developed by Charles the Bold that Chastelain found alarming.

excessive zeal for the affairs of state, but soon converge around more serious vices, such as avarice, inspired by bad counsels,<sup>64</sup> and ultimately, the excessive use of military force.

It is, in Chastelain's view, Charles's uncontrollable pride and hatred directed against his enemies that inspires him to actions that might easily provoke the destruction of the wellbeing of lands and people entrusted to him by God.<sup>65</sup> If Chastelain's portrait of Charles's enemy, the French king, is increasingly unflattering, so is the insistence on similarities that Chastelain now finds between Charles the Bold and Louis XI. Both, '*ensievans leur propre appétit plus que d'autrui, tinrent en ce temps-cy les homes de ça et là en soin et en peur de meschief*'. Both, according to Chastelain, directed their efforts at least indirectly towards *désolation du monde*, subjected the common people to excessive taxation and plundering, and devoted themselves industriously to the service of the enemy of man.<sup>66</sup> War, in this framework of argumentation, is merely an extension of inequitable policy by other means—in this case, an extension of internal ruin and plundering of subjects (by inordinate taxation) into the neighbour's domain. An attempt has been made recently to explain this frame of argumentation in Chastelain's chronicle by his general pessimism and his vision of the permanent state of decline of the world.<sup>67</sup> This may be true; however, it is important to keep in mind that in that case such a frame of thinking about Burgundian history was a personal feature of Chastelain, since other accounts discussed here, even if sharing a sceptical attitude towards the virtues of new princes as compared to old ones,<sup>68</sup> are less critical in their general evaluation of the rulers' actions. Neither Molinet nor La Marche treat war between the rulers of Burgundy and France as inherently evil per se, they only criticise those actions which they see as morally wrong or incompetent (or both), and more frequently these are actions committed by those supporting the French side overtly or covertly.

Chastelain dies at the time of the siege of Neuss, and the task to reintegrate the story of Charles's military competence and disruptive actions into the general framework of *bien publique* is left to the next historiographer,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. See also Delclos, *Le Témoignage* pp. 198–201.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Emerson, *Olivier de La Marche* (see n. 16), pp. 93–4.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 94–6.

Molinet. Zingel's claim that Chastelain's successor in the position of official chronicler of the court of Burgundy was less politically minded than Chastelain, is simply untrue. That conclusion has been drawn from the fact that Jean Molinet is less obsessed with the relations between his princes and the kings of France;<sup>69</sup> however, one finds in Molinet's chronicle more detailed and more sophisticated portrayals of the relations between local elites, individuals and institutions, in sorting out of the distressed state of the *chose publique*. For the most part, this quality of Molinet's chronicle reveals itself in the sections describing events after the death of Charles the Bold.

As in the case of Chastelain, Molinet's evaluation of the character and actions of Charles the Bold is also an interesting example of the complexity of the task faced by the *indiciaire* or official historian. While it is easy, at first glance, to discard much of Molinet's text as an unending sequence of flattering similes and clichés,<sup>70</sup> it is also a narrative of the difficult relationship between the most bellicose Valois duke and the *chose publique*. From the very beginning, Molinet is faced with the task of presenting Charles's wars on foreign territory as part of his task of caring for the *bien publique*. The connection is not evident, therefore Molinet resorts to a complex rhetorical device. He compares Charles's decision to protect the interests of the archbishop of Cologne and to besiege a city outside his own states to the self-sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of humanity and of Marcus Curtius for the salvation of Rome. From there, the connection to public good is made evident: Molinet speaks of '... Duke Charles, who, leaving aside his own claims (against other sovereigns—M.G.) for the benefit of the *bien publique* and to support his most noble relations, friends and allies, and most of all for the good of the ecclesiastic peace, exposed his body, his subjects and his means to the fortunes of war...'.<sup>71</sup> Molinet is careful to point out that Charles is not guided by a mere thirst

<sup>69</sup> Zingel, *Frankreich, das Reich und Burgund*, p. 167.

<sup>70</sup> Molinet's literary style has been criticised and viewed as a barrier to understanding his political message not only by the literary scholars of the old school (e.g. N. Dupire, *Jean Molinet: la vie, les oeuvres*, Paris 1932; G. Gröber/S. Höfer, *Geschichte der mittelfranzösischer Literatur*, 2nd edition (Berlin/Leipzig, 1937), p. 213), but also much more recently by Michael Zingel, *Frankreich, das Reich und Burgund* (see n. 5), p. 166.

<sup>71</sup> '... duc Charles qui, differant de ses propres querelles pour l'augmentation du bien publique et subvenir a ses très nobles parens, amis et alyés, sommièrement au bien de paix ecclesiastique, exposa aux fortunes de guerre son corpz, ses subgetz et sa substance...', Molinet, *Chroniques* (see n. 33), I, p. 29.



for glory.<sup>72</sup> This is not surprising, given the fact that thirst for glory was frowned upon by the normative literature promoting notions of inner nobility—such as the humanist version of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* known at the court of Burgundy in a creative French translation.<sup>73</sup>

However, as the siege of Neuss progresses without result and the number of enemies and powers alienated by the duke increases, it becomes increasingly difficult for Molinet to justify Burgundy's position in Germany. In a passage which, according to some scholars, was added much later (after Charles's death and the dynastic alliance with the Habsburgs),<sup>74</sup> Molinet ventures to be discretely critical when Charles's bellicose stance provokes military confrontation with the emperor. Here, for the first time, he indicates that Charles's character and policies may lead him to failure and offers an unflattering comparison between Charles's style of politics and that of his father:

...Mitigate your ardent desire, restrain your high daring, diminish your exalted claims, convert your sword into an instrument of (peaceful) labour, your lance into an olive branch... It is written: 'Who delights in peril, shall perish in peril.' Walk therefore with your blessed father in the shade of concord, content with what is yours without aspiring to highest honours (*sommières dignitéz*), and you shall be enthroned with him in the glorious throne of honour... He (your father) loved the Holy Roman Empire which he never molested, do not drive it into decline by warring with its emperor. He addressed his ill-wishers benevolently, and you rebuff your well-wishers malevolently. He was well-loved for his friendliness and you are well-served because you are feared. He acquired friends by unprepossessing demeanour (*humblesse*), and you multiply enemies by arrogance.<sup>75</sup>

To this critique, before the disaster of Nancy, new touches are occasionally added. The mass executions of Swiss prisoners at Granson (where a garrison of Charles's allies had been previously massacred by the Swiss themselves) provoke Molinet's regrets, voiced almost as strongly as the critique

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., I, p. 43: '*filz de Mars, alors et du tout adonné à la guerre, estoit très joyeux d'avoir trouvé son passe tempz, plus pour excerciter son ost en durté yvernale et en la querele de son alyé que pour ambition de propre gloire*'.

<sup>73</sup> Vanderjagt, *Qui sa vertu anoblist* (see n. 6), pp. 157–161.

<sup>74</sup> Zingel, *Frankreich, das Reich, und Burgund* (see n. 5), p. 176. Doutrepont et Jodogne's edition of Molinet's *Chronique* indicates that the more critical sentences in this passage are not present in the manuscript in Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. This may indicate they were added to other manuscripts of the same chronicle (that remained in the Netherlands) after Charles's demise and the union with the Habsburgs.

<sup>75</sup> Translated from Molinet (see n. 33), I, p. 93.



of Charles's opponents.<sup>76</sup> It is remarkable that the court historiographer of the duke of Burgundy does not try to mitigate the impression of cruelty by pointing to the fact that the executed Swiss had themselves executed the previous Savoyard garrison of Granson.<sup>77</sup> Describing Charles's attitude on the eve of Nancy, Molinet does nothing to reduce the impression of an irate, melancholy leader who does not heed the advice of well-meaning courtiers.<sup>78</sup>

However, as soon as Charles is dead, his military actions are again presented in a different light. Molinet employs a clear and simple strategy to show that the duke was, after all, a true and competent protector of the common good, and ultimately a successful one. Several proofs of his competence are offered to the potential reader of the *Chroniques*. Charles's fame had resounded across lands and countries and reached the infidels; there were days when he received embassies from four kings and three dukes under his roof. He had invaded the lands of the most powerful king in Christendom, and was himself worthy of a royal sceptre. Since his victories were bound to remain imprinted on the memory of humanity, he was to be remembered specifically as '*le vray et hardy champion de la chose publique qui, à bonne et juste querele, a offert et sacrifié son corpz... pour nous acquerre quelque jour le règne de paix bieneurée*'.<sup>79</sup> His bellicose actions, once presented as inhuman and incompetent, are now redeemed and inserted as an instance of self-sacrifice into the narrative of *bien publique*, much in the same manner as they had been a little earlier by the Bruges rhetorician Anthonis de Roovere: 'We rest comfortably at home, and he, whether it pleases him or not, suffers snow and hail'.<sup>80</sup>

As soon as the story of Charles's actions is forced back into the narrative of public good, the field is free for new actors to negotiate among

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., I, pp. 138–9. The expressions used are '*doloureux exploit*', '*cruelle et ployable extermination*', '*trop inhumainement les avoit traittez*'. Descriptions of innumerable bodies hanging on the trees left by Wilwolt von Schaumberg, a bitter opponent of Charles, are not dissimilar to those given by his court chronicler (Werner Paravicini, "Follie raisonnable", Charles le Téméraire, duc de Bourgogne', in Susan Marti, Till-Holger Borchert and Gabriele Keck (eds.), *Charles le Téméraire*, exhibition catalogue, (Bern and Brussels, 2008) p. 45).

<sup>77</sup> Jean Devaux, 'La fin du Téméraire... ou la mémoire d'un prince ternie par l'un des siens', in *Le Moyen Age*, 95 (1989), pp. 109–110.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 124; Molinet (see n. 33), I, p. 164.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., I, 208.

<sup>80</sup> Johan B. Oosterman, "Oh, Flanders, Weep!" Anthonis de Roovere and Charles the Bold', in: M. Gosman, A. J. Vanderjagt and J. R. Veenstra (eds.), *The Growth of Authority in the Medieval West* (Groningen, 1999).

themselves the ways to lead the political community out of the crisis. The death of one, in whom 'the safety of the land and hope of a hundred thousand creatures' resided, has left the remaining high personages with the task of 'working so that it should turn out for the honour of the nobles, for the profit of common good and for the salvation of their souls'.<sup>81</sup> Yet there is no longer a single protagonist moving the events forward through his singular will: instead, various individuals and collectivities engage in the political fray. The question of their competence is ambiguous. Thus, on the one hand, the commoners, the *povre menu people*, seem to possess no political competence at all, left like sheep without their shepherd to their miserable lot,<sup>82</sup> and credulously trusting in the stories of Charles's miraculous return.<sup>83</sup> But on the other hand, in the same chapter, some commoners are better prepared to repel the enemy out of loyalty to the dynasty than some nobles, who were quick to change sides and surrender the towns entrusted to their keeping to the king of France.<sup>84</sup>

Municipalities and officers, too, are shown to behave each according to their level of (in)competence. Molinet's opinion of the judgement, valour and overall competence of cities as political communities has always been ambiguous. Thus, while the people of Neuss are 'nourished in fire, iron and blood' (*nourry en feu, en fer, en sang*), which makes the city itself '*hutineuse, arrogante, espineuse et adonnée à la guerre*',<sup>85</sup> later on their military prowess is praised: 'If knightly prowess ever found its residence in some city on the face of the earth, it had a glorious habitation in Neuss; none was more trained in arms, none more harsh in skirmishes, none prouder in sumptuous enterprise'.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the key here is in the location '*en ville*', remembering that Molinet is an adherent of the traditional chivalric creed that accuses the burghers of the Low Countries of cowardice and of unjustly raising their complaints against the nobility that

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<sup>81</sup> Molinet (see n. 33), I, p. 224.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., I, 209.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 209; 218. Molinet expanded on his ideas concerning the political vulnerability of the common people in *La Resource du Petit Peuple*, a political poem describing the sufferings caused by the wars that followed after 1477. For an interpretation, see Paul Zumthor, *Le Masque et le Lumière: La poétique des grands rhétoriciens* (Paris, 1978), pp. 65ff, 147ff.

<sup>85</sup> Molinet (see n. 33), I, pp. 32–3.

<sup>86</sup> In the original: '*Se proesce chevalereuse trouva oncques residence en ville sur terre, elle avoit en Nuyse glorieuse habitation; nulle plus stillée aux armes, nulle plus aspre aux escarmuces, nulle plus fière en sumptueux emprendre*'. Ibid., p. 43.

regularly subjects itself to the dangers of war.<sup>87</sup> When the crunch comes in 1477, some cities in the territories disputed by the king of France preserve themselves, like the wise virgins in the biblical parable, all owing to the competence of those in charge: '*Et ce bien leur vint avec la bonne volonté qu'elles avoyent par les sages et prudens conducteurs et conseillers qui les avoyent en garde.*'<sup>88</sup>

### *Institutional Competence*

Taking into account the complexity of the administration of the Burgundian Netherlands, it is not surprising that the traditional discourse of justice and public good sometimes acquires more concrete institutional forms in the narratives of success and failure of various political actors. The dukes of Burgundy occasionally get judged on the basis of such institutional competence by the court-based historians. An interesting case in point is the way the chroniclers treat the institutional reforms of Charles the Bold and the subsequent attempts of Maximilian of Austria to maintain consensus between various political interests in the Netherlands.

La Marche, who is, on the whole, more interested in the military and ceremonial aspects of government, nevertheless offers a short evaluation of Charles's act of instituting the supreme court at Malines. Instituting the new *parlement* in defiance of the sovereign court of Paris is not merely an act of will, it requires legal prowess, as La Marche points out, using the arguments that Charles the Bold had used to justify his move to forbid his subjects to appeal for redress at the *parlement* of Paris:

... Someone could ask me, how he could constrain his subjects who wanted to resort for appeal in France, as (those of) Artois, Flanders or Boulennois... which are lordships held from France since the old days. To this I reply, that by the agreement made and by the peace sworn between the king of France and him, the king had accorded that if he breaks, trespasses or contravenes the peace of Peronne, he frees the duke from all fealty and homage... Which peace was broken, and contravened by this king of France, as your grandfather the duke maintained. That is why he called himself sovereign in those lordships, and acted as sovereign there until his death. But when he died, the lands rebelled against my lady your mother,

<sup>87</sup> Paul Zumthor, *Le Masque et le Lumière* (see n. 84), pp. 68–9. See also Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des ceremonies* (see n. 11), pp. 58–9, on the topos of the prince and the nobility exposing their bodies to danger for the good of the subjects in the rhetoric of Philip the Good, Charles the Bold and Molinet.

<sup>88</sup> Molinet (see n. 33), I, p. 218.

their princess, and wanted to have old and new privileges as it pleased them, that is why this *parlement* was overthrown and abolished.<sup>89</sup>

It is, thus, not Charles who acts arbitrarily in La Marche's narrative—his decision to establish the *parlement* as the last resort for appeal in his lands rests on an interpretation of legal consequences of the treaty of Peronne, which La Marche seems to approve. The unruly subjects, however, are shown to have acted without a solid legal base: they merely wanted new privileges (and novelty in the context of privileges means corruption),<sup>90</sup> and thus their act of overthrowing the *parlement* established by the duke could not be justified—they moved arbitrarily 'as it pleased them'. While the passage vindicates Charles's institutional competence, it undermines that of the Estates and cities.

Another aspect of institutional competence is the instrumental use of justice. Charles the Bold was particularly fond of articulating his concept of princely justice, inserting references to it in his ordinances and speeches whenever possible.<sup>91</sup> Molinet in his chronicle seems to endorse the instrumental use of justice for political goals. Thus, when Charles needs to feed his army at Neuss, he resorts to justice in order to procure resources: when his camp is in need of provisions but local peasants are afraid to deliver for fear of their produce being pillaged, Molinet describes how the duke has a marketplace set up, complete with a tall cross of wood upon which a gauntlet and a bare sword are exposed, suggesting that whoever says '*quelque injure ou villonie*' to the merchants, would forfeit his hand, and whoever touches them forfeits his life.<sup>92</sup> Molinet claims that the sellers were 'peacefully treated' by the Burgundian army, who refrained from rapacious behaviour because of the '*miroir juridique*' before their eyes.<sup>93</sup>

Lack of institutional competence (failure to adhere to the customs and common usages of the time) is criticised by Chastelain, also in the context of ducal justice. One of the shortcomings of the prince that can be potentially disruptive for the common good is rigour of justice without mercy.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Translated from Olivier de La Marche/Antoine (see n. 44), I, p. 76.

<sup>90</sup> Dumolyn, 'Privileges and novelties' (see n. 21), pp. 19–20.

<sup>91</sup> On the most famous discourse of justice in the ordinances of Charles the Bold, see Vanderjagt, *Qui sa vertu anoblist* (see n. 6), pp. 57ff. See also Wim Blockmans, 'Crisme de leze magesté. Les idées politiques de Charles le Temeraire', in: J.-M. Duvosquel, J. Nazet, and A. Vanrie, eds., *Les Pays-Bas bourguignons. Histoire et institutions* (Brussels, 1996), pp. 71–81.

<sup>92</sup> Molinet (see n. 33), I, p. 51.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>94</sup> See, e.g., Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the Body Politic* (see n. 59), pp. 30–31.

The highly ambiguous treatment that Chastelain gives to the episode with the bastard of La Hamaide, who was executed at the command of Charles the Bold despite the compensation that his family had paid to the relatives of the man he had murdered, is a case in point.<sup>95</sup> Chastelain implicitly criticises Charles's severity, by claiming that the king (of France) and other princes would habitually distribute pardons in such cases, and by describing the outrage provoked by the execution among the relatives of the young man and among the citizenry of Bruges.<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, in the end Chastelain also strives to provide a plausible explanation for Charles's behaviour, which could otherwise be viewed as unjustified in terms of public good. Apart from some secret reasons, Chastelain claims, the duke may have wished to show to the 'nations of the world' gathered in Bruges for his wedding, that he was an impartial and severe judge.<sup>97</sup>

Capacity to uphold justice and all procedures connected with it, despite its paramount importance, is by no means the only facet of the prince's institutional competence as presented in official histories. Vanderjagt has noted before that the capacity to uphold justice was deemed a material circumstance, dependent on the prince's power and magnificence.<sup>98</sup> Magnificence is, therefore, a crucial characteristic for a successful prince. Thus, La Marche, summarising the successes of Philip the Good, dwells on his financial capacity and his *grand estat*.<sup>99</sup> Chastelain's description of the 'magnificences' of Charles the Bold is famous, and Molinet finds it appropriate to repeat it in his chronicle when summarising the circumstances of the duke's life and death. It is important to keep in mind that the 'magnificences' in question were not mere demonstrations of wealth or ceremony (as a modern reading of the term may suggest): they were episodes of particularly acute public manifestations of power, such as the occasion when the charter of privileges of the city of Ghent was destroyed in front of the eyes of the delegates of the city kneeling before the duke in his palace in Brussels.<sup>100</sup>

Closely linked to magnificence, the capacity to institute is a form of institutional competence par excellence. This kind of competence is by

<sup>95</sup> Chastelain, *Chronique* (see n. 63), pp. 459ff. See also Jean Claude Delclos, *Le Témoignage de Georges Chastelain* (Geneva, 1980), p. 193 on the same episode.

<sup>96</sup> Chastelain, *Chronique* (see n. 63), p. 462.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463.

<sup>98</sup> Vanderjagt, *Qui sa vertu anoblist* (see n. 14), pp. 66–67.

<sup>99</sup> Olivier de La Marche/Antoine (see n. 44) I, p. 494.

<sup>100</sup> See Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca and London, 1996) pp. 155–6.

no means limited to the persons of the dukes and other princes. Prominent officials and even representatives of the trouble-making cities are at times shown to possess it too. La Marche's treatment of Chacellor Rolin as a model of justice and competent management of affairs has been mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Also Peter Bladelin in La Marche's description is a competent administrator, not only involved in the successful running of the duke's finances and those of the Order of the Golden Fleece, but also a founder of a new city: 'and was one of the most powerful and rich men in the county of Flanders... a man expert in finance; and in his time (he) built at his own expense a good town of his, which they call Middelburg in Flanders, and had it protected with towers and walls, and most nobly laid out.'<sup>101</sup>

A commoner's rise to high status in itself, however, is not sufficient to qualify the commoner as competent if requisite inner qualities are lacking<sup>102</sup>—especially in the case when accusations of treason have been levelled against him. Chastelain dwells at length on the lack of learning and other accomplishments in Jehan Coustain, despite the fact that before his fall (he was accused of trying to poison the count of Charolais), the first valet of Philip the Good was, according to Chastelain himself, a man of extraordinary wealth and influence.<sup>103</sup> Chastelain mentions in particular that Coustain was unlettered (*indocte et sans lettres*) and possessed no significant virtues.<sup>104</sup>

What of the regional representative bodies through which power was habitually channelled in the Burgundian Netherlands of the fifteenth century? Their competence in the running of public affairs comes into the spotlight later, with the clashes over the right to rule the Netherlands in the name of the little Philip the Fair. Let us look at Molinet describing how Maximilian and the Estates General reach an agreement about *modus vivendi* after Maximilian's imprisonment in Bruges. Several factors

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<sup>101</sup> 'et fut un des puissants et riches homes d'avoir de la comté de Flandres... homme expert en finances; et de son temps edifia de ses deniers une bonne ville sienne, que l'on nomme Middelburg en Flandres: et la fit faire clorre, tower et murer, et habiller molt notablement'. *Olivier de La Marche/Antoine* (see n. 44), I, p. 257. On the political meaning of Bladelin's building programme in Middelburg, see Wim de Clercq, Jean Dumolyn, and Jelle Haemers, 'Vivre Noblement: Material Culture and Elite Identity in Late Medieval Flanders', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxxviii: 1 (2007), pp. 1–31.

<sup>102</sup> See the quotation from Jean de Lannoy insiting on inner virtue as necessary prerequisite for nobility and government in the Introduction, (n. 14).

<sup>103</sup> On the Coustain affair, see L. B. Ross, 'The strange case of Jean Coustain or how "not" to write a thriller', *Publications du Centre Européen d'Etudes Bourguignonnes*, 48 (2008).

<sup>104</sup> Chastelain, *Chronique*, ed. by Kervin de Lettenhove (Brussels, 1864), IV, p. 237.

set this episode apart as one of the most complex in Molinet's narrative. A maximum number of actors, institutional and individual, is involved. The chronicle attempts to reconstruct a series of multi-level complex relationships (between Maximilian and the citizens of Bruges, between the Four Members of Flanders and other constituent parts of the Estates General, between Maximilian and Estates General) that have both direct and indirect effect on the public good.

Thus, initially the Estates General cannot come to immediate agreement about the treaty of reconciliation concerning who shall control the upbringing of the young archduke Philip, because the Three Members of Flanders and the estates of other lands (Holland, Zeeland, Brabant, Hainault, the cities of Lille and Douay, etc.—*Estats des pays*) have differing standpoints. The Four Members wish to take the rights of regency of other lands away from Maximilian, *veu son gouvernement*, while the representatives of other lands point out that this would make their situation problematic, since unlike Flanders, they are situated within the Empire (and thus potentially vulnerable to the emperor's revenge). They have no doubt however, that an arrangement concerning the form of government can be reached—*provision seroit mise au gouvernement des pays*.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, a number of provisions having been secured, the official ceremony of reconciliation is to take place. At this point, the interaction of the prince and representative institutions acquires a visual communicative dimension that puts their institutional and discursive competence under scrutiny. The description is appropriately detailed and demonstrates both a certain adherence to traditional reconciliation ceremony and politically motivated deviations from it.

A platform for the ceremony is built and decorated. After a procession, the church dignitaries and the Estates mount the platform for the ceremony of reconciliation. However, Maximilian, wary of degrading his regal dignity after several months of utter humiliation, disrupts the vision of civic unity by refusing to mount the platform. Instead, he retires with some nobles of his retinue to the house where he was previously imprisoned, next to the marketplace. Suddenly, there is a huge outcry from the populace, at which the churchmen, 'to save themselves', throw off their mitres and mantles and dash for cover, fearing a new outrage from the crowd. Meanwhile, the city authorities and the delegates of the Members of Flanders show their capacity for compromise: *echevins* of the city of

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<sup>105</sup> Molinet, *Chroniques* (see n. 33), II, p. 9.



Bruges and representatives of the Four Members, all in black, go and kneel before Maximilian in the place of his retreat and have their statement of contrition read out to him. The language is that of an *amende honorable*,<sup>106</sup> stating that because of the '*grant mesus, rudes insolences et horribles excès*' they have committed and allowed the people to commit against his person, they can have no hope of his pardon except by intercession of certain intermediaries. Upon which they return to the platform, kneel again, this time before the Estates General, and with all appropriate rhetoric and, according to Molinet, a certain amount of tears, implore their intercession before the king. The members of the Estates then walk over to the same place where Maximilian is still standing and deliver their address of intercession. In response, Maximilian tells through a courtier that he pardons the citizens of Bruges and the Members of Flanders their offences against him. Then he finally comes to the platform to swear the oath of peace, as do the Estates. At this point, the churchmen resume their role as the bishop of Tournai accepts the vows and celebrates mass.<sup>107</sup>

It is easy to read the above description as a ritual, designed to disguise the powerlessness of the prince and the violent conflict still raging behind the façade. That may be true, but the description with which Molinet provides us goes deeper than the surface. His reader is already aware that different members of the Estates General have formulated their interests differently in the deliberations leading to this scene. His reader also knows that Maximilian had great difficulty to provide the hostages to act as guarantee for his good behaviour, as Duke Christoph of Bavaria and the margrave of Baden had refused to act as hostages for him.<sup>108</sup> What the chronicler constructs here is not an illusion of harmony, but a narrative of compromise, in which individuals and institutions act on behalf of their interests and negotiate the essence of government, while all the time holding on to the general reference framework of public good. Their ability to represent their interests, but also to accept compromise in the name of peace, are the qualities that, for Molinet, render them competent.

In this narrative of institutional competence, the Church as institution plays a fairly insignificant role. Apart from the comic description of their fear of the crowd, the clerics' role in the above ceremony is insignificant—

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<sup>106</sup> On *amende honorable* and its role in the public reconciliation of the dukes of Burgundy and their rebellious cities, see Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca and London, 1996), pp. 114–126.

<sup>107</sup> Molinet, *Chroniques* (see n. 33), II, pp. 11–13.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.



and no specific political competence is ascribed to them. Like Chastelain, Molinet tends to leave the churchmen out of his descriptions of affairs of state, unless they act in their capacity as ducal councillors or otherwise fulfil state functions.

### *Discursive Competence*

Linked to institutional competence, but distinct from it, is discursive competence. The latter medieval prince has been called 'a man of dialogue'.<sup>109</sup> He had to negotiate the space of his authority with corporate political actors such as municipalities and provincial estates, therefore, to be successful, he had to negotiate well. The act of speech itself was invested, in the case of Burgundian dukes, with symbolic and political meaning.<sup>110</sup>

Discursive competence is attributed to Charles the Bold by Chastelain and Molinet alike, yet Chastelain dwells also on the cases when Charles does not perform his communicative functions properly. Lack of transparency in the duke's behaviour irks Chastelain no less than the lack of mercy. Chastelain praises the first '*belle response*' that the duke gives to the relatives of the condemned bastard of La Hamaide, focusing on the inalienable rights of subjects and the duty of the prince to uphold justice, but he later deplores the fact that secretly, Charles had already resolved that the culprit should die, and his answers to next intercessions are insincere: 'But the duke answered little, and (the meaning of) what he said remained obscure.'<sup>111</sup>

Molinet shows Charles intervening discursively to set things right when not all goes well at the siege of Neuss. When the Italians abandon the mines he had told them to guard, Charles's reaction is described as a discursive one: he addresses the Lombards in public (*en commun spectacle*), and Molinet renders his speech in full, although it abounds in such convoluted rhetoric that one can hardly imagine it pronounced in a military camp. It is very much in the style of Molinet, much less in the style of other known speeches of Charles the Bold.<sup>112</sup> Charles is also said to give

<sup>109</sup> Jean-Philippe Genet, 'Political Theory and Local Communities in Late Medieval France and England', in J. R. F. Highfield and R. Jeffs (eds.), *The Crown and Local Communities in England and France in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1981) p. 19.

<sup>110</sup> Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, 'Et le prince respondit de par sa bouche'. Monarchal Speech Habits in Late Medieval Europe', J. Deploige, G. Deneckere (eds.), *Mystifying the Monarch. Studies on Discourse, Power, and History* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 55–64.

<sup>111</sup> Chastelain, *Chronique* (see n. 63), p. 461.

<sup>112</sup> Molinet, *Chroniques* (see n. 33), I, pp. 80–81.

a speech to his captains at Neuss, in '*doulz langaige humble et amiable*', exhorting them to support him when he learns of the approach of the emperor and his army.<sup>113</sup>

Discursive competence is important for ducal officers and members of the Estates. At the crucial points of rupture, whenever the peace between the prince and the community had been broken (as happened regularly in the Burgundian Netherlands), the discursive aspect of public reconciliations was no less important than the visual one, and chroniclers represent it as an attainment of the orators involved. During the reconciliation process after the imprisonment of Maximilian in Bruges, Molinet shows us how, as the Estates General come to intercede formally before Maximilian for the citizens of Bruges and the Three Members of Flanders, a representative from Zeeland delivers their address, intended, according to Molinet, '*pour ouvrir le Coeur du roy et qy'il desploya le tresor de sa misericorde, pour aussi induire les delinquans à repentance*'.<sup>114</sup>

However, the trouble with discursive competence is that it does not belong to the princes and loyal subjects alone, but also to their enemies. Molinet regularly attributes skilful manipulation in separate negotiations with Burgundian vassals to the king of France at the time when the Burgundian state is disintegrating in front of the historian's eyes.<sup>115</sup> The disloyal elements inciting civil unrest also make good use of discursive competence in the political field, as the example of one of the leaders of the Ghent opposition to Maximilian in 1487 shows: '*il trouva matière de rebellion et suscita les Membres et les testes folles en leurs erreurs et folle opinion*'.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, as Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers have demonstrated recently, there were some among the *testes folles* who possessed sufficient rhetorical competence and daring to challenge Maximilian's regency on the grounds of contractual nature of his power—a premise which he had, according to the addresses delivered to the Estates General by the Ghent lawyer Guillaume Zoete, blatantly violated.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., I, p. 92.

<sup>114</sup> Molinet, *Chroniques* (see n. 33), II, p. 12.

<sup>115</sup> E.g. Ibid., I, pp. 209–218.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., I, p. 582.

<sup>117</sup> Jan Dumolyn, Jelle Haemers, "Les bonnes causes du peuple *pour se révolter*". *Libertés urbaines et luttes de pouvoir aux Pays-Bas méridionaux (1488)*, conference paper, 2009, [http://www.historiaurbium.org/english/Conference%202009/Dumolyn\\_Haemers.pdf](http://www.historiaurbium.org/english/Conference%202009/Dumolyn_Haemers.pdf), last accessed on 10.09.2011.

While, as the examples above demonstrate, military, institutional and discursive competence are important for a political leader in the eyes of the Burgundian chroniclers, it seems that, very much in tune with the secular nature of Burgundian state ideology, a ruler's religious zeal and ability to uphold the right kind of faith in his subjects is not treated as a significant competence. This does not go to say that religious practices as such are not important. La Marche, perhaps the most expressly pious of the three authors discussed here, does insert references to Christian piety in his narrative of political events, and so does the cleric Molinet. It is important, however, to see in what context and how that is done.

This is a summary of the way La Marche describes the achievements of Philip the Good in the chapter dwelling upon his death: Philip died the richest prince of his time, and the most liberal. He had married off his nieces at his expense, and was able to sustain large-scale warfare for a long time. He supported (financially) the Church and in particular the chapel of Jerusalem and the knights on Rhodes. And finally, he held a great court and lived in great ceremony (*grand estat*), 'approaching that of a king'.<sup>118</sup> The support for religious establishments is mentioned, but it is an external act of piety very much in keeping with the institutional nature of a prince's power. There is not a word, for instance, of Philip's policy towards the Papacy, and no dwelling on the fact that during his reign, a long process against heresy happened in Arras. Of the well-known Burgundian chroniclers, only Jacques Du Clercq dwells at length on the trials in Arras, but he was based there and the events of local importance were central to his chronicle. Even for him, however, the whole affair at Arras is more a matter of human wickedness and greed (primarily of the accusers) and less a matter of upholding public good.<sup>119</sup> If anything, excessive zeal of religious persecutions is seen to disrupt peace and trouble justice.

La Marche's praise for the crusading ambitions of Philip the Good is part of the same tendency: the defence of faith is presented as a predominantly external activity, much like the preservation of peace. It requires resources<sup>120</sup> and potentially exposes the prince and his goods and subjects

<sup>118</sup> La Marche/Antoine (see n. 44), I, p. 494.

<sup>119</sup> Jacques Du Clercq, *Chronique*, in J. A. C. Buchon (ed.), *Choix de Chroniques et Mémoires sur l'Histoire de France* (Paris, 1838), IV, Chaptres XIV–XVII.

<sup>120</sup> Not only resources spent on military effort per se—witness La Marche's initial scruples about the expense involved in staging the famous banquet of the Pheasant, where crusading oaths were taken.

to danger—however, it has little to do with internal piety of the prince and subjects, and no proofs of the latter are required.

To summarise, the model of political competence in the works of court-based historiographers in the Burgundian Netherlands between c. 1470 and c. 1500 is centred around the representations of military, institutional and discursive competence that is ascribed to princes, high officials and occasionally, representatives of the Estates. Neither of these groups holds a permanent claim to competence by default. Their failures to adhere to the ideal normative model are at times castigated, even in the case of princes—even though the latter are more frequently vindicated as exponents of political competence *par excellence*. Religious disposition and the preservation of true faith is seldom accentuated as a core competence of any important group of political actors, even though the acts of external piety are valued and commended. Like the preservation of peace, the preservation of faith is more often viewed as a political activity directed at external enemies—thus, the support for the knights of Rhodes and the crusading ambitions of Philip the Good are remembered as noteworthy by the authors of court histories.

The examination of the texts of court histories in this chapter confirms the conclusions that Arjo Vanderjagt made on the basis of his analysis of normative literature popular at the court of Burgundy: the nature of political competence, like the nature of the state itself, was secular in the sense that it was not preoccupied with matters of spiritual salvation and limited itself entirely to the management of political affairs of the community. The following chapters will trace the transformation of this model to the point when religion became an intrinsic part of political competence—and beyond to the point when its importance in dynastic models of competence dwindled once again.

## CHAPTER TWO

### POLITICS INTO FICTION: MAXIMILIAN'S TRANSFORMATION OF THE BURGUNDIAN MODEL

The culture of Burgundian-Netherlandish political institutions did not change much after 1477, but the prestige of Burgundian court culture and its influence on the new ruler, Maximilian of Austria, in the long run led to a curious re-interpretation of the Burgundian notions of dynastic virtue and legitimacy embodied in the person of the prince.

When the official historiographer of the court of Burgundy, Jean Molinet, begins his description of the important battle of Guinegate in 1479, he applies to Maximilian of Austria the traditional formula ascribing salutary competence to the dukes of Burgundy: '*Le très redoubté duc d'Austrice... par l'ardant amour et bon zèle qu'il avoit au bien des pays et au salut de la chose publique, se tira sus frontière d'ennemis...*'. Maximilian's personal rule, first as regent for his son in the Netherlands, then as King of the Romans (nominally sharing some of the political authority in Germany with his father), as ruler of Inner Austria and finally as emperor, is a key period during which some of the political ideas generated in the Burgundian Netherlands were transmitted to the next generations of the dynasty. However, very little attention has been given so far to the way in which Maximilian's representation transformed and even distorted the model of political competence developed in the Burgundian Netherlands, undermining the aspect of that model that had to do with the institutional and negotiable nature of politics and emphasising sheer military force and top-down decision making.

Austrian historians have been enthusiastic in claiming that much of 'Maximilian's propaganda' was inspired by Maximilian's Burgundian experience.<sup>1</sup> The term 'propaganda' itself is not entirely unproblematic,

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<sup>1</sup> On the 'propaganda' of Maximilian I, see especially Georg Wagner, 'Maximilian I. und die politische Propaganda', in: *Maximilian I.*, exhibition catalogue (Innsbruck, 1969), pp. 33ff; Manfred Hollegger, 'Erwachen und aufstehen als ein starker stryter. Zu Formen und Inhalt der Propaganda Maximilians I.', in: Karel Hruza (ed.), *Propaganda, Kommunikation und Öffentlichkeit, 11.–16. Jahrhundert*, Vorschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 6 (Vienna, 2002). Not touching on the origins but also engaging with the notion of Maximilian's 'propaganda': Christina Lutter, 'An das Volk von Venedig!', *Propaganda Maximilians I. in Venedig*, in Hruza (ed.), *Propaganda, Kommunikation und Öffentlichkeit*.

however, one can probably use it in the sense described by Karl Vocelka—as ‘opinion-making’ (*Meinungsbeeinflussung*).<sup>2</sup> Hermann Wiesflecker insisted that Maximilian’s universal imperial claims, his ‘militarism’ and his court historiography, marked by a striving for world domination, were all results of the ‘Burgundian experience’ (*‘burgundische Erlebnis’*).<sup>3</sup> The following chapter poses some questions to this general assumption and attempts to survey, how much of the original Burgundian model of political competence actually survived in Maximilian’s court historiography.

### *The Ideological Background*

Some researchers have described the Habsburg court historiography in Maximilian’s times mainly as part of what they called his propaganda,<sup>4</sup> without distinguishing between the purposes of historiography as glorification for posterity (*Gedechnus*),<sup>5</sup> historiography as propaganda and historiography as a repository of normative models of princely government. In order to get a more balanced impression of the forms and motives of Maximilian’s court historiography, it is important to recognise the difference of purpose between works such as the Latin autobiography of the emperor ghost-written by Grünpeck,<sup>6</sup> and works of propaganda or ‘opinion making’ proper (such as, for instance, the many letters to the princes and Estates of the Empire that the emperor had published in his lifetime). On the other hand, it is true that polemic pieces engaging in a direct way with the politics of the time provide important background for understanding the ideology that also informed the works of court historiography. Therefore it is perhaps useful to outline first the thematic repertory of Maximilian’s political propaganda, before turning to the much narrower inquiry concerning the models of political competence in his court histories.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Vocelka, *Rudolf II und seine Zeit* (Vienna, 1985), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I. Das Reich, Österreich und Europa and der Wende zur Neuzeit*, 5 vols. (Vienna/Munich, 1971–1986), I, pp. 228f, 232f, 243–7, V, pp. 411f.

<sup>4</sup> Especially Manfred Hollegger (see n. 1) and Georg Wagner (see n. 1).

<sup>5</sup> On Maximilian’s court historiography as part of his *Gedechnus* project, see Jan-Dirk Müller, *Gedechnus. Literatur und Hofgesellschaft um Maximilian I.* (Munich, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> On the earlier versions of the Latin biography, see Wiesflecker, *Joseph Grünpecks Commentaria* (see n. 15). The later version, *Historia Friderici and Maximiliani*, has been later re-published in several German translations and critical editions, the most recent one being by Otto Benesch and Erwin Auer (eds.), *Die Historia Friderici et Maximiliani* (Berlin, 1957).

An outline of the main topics of the emperor's propaganda will always be incomplete, as Maximilian and his circle of organic intellectuals have produced, in their time, a tremendous amount of political, historical and other writings experimenting with a very broad spectrum of ideas all of which cannot be easily summarised. The following is only a synthesis of the most generic political ideas, particularly those that have relevance for the main questions of this study.

The narratives of power, politics and historical mission of the Habsburgs at the time of Maximilian were imperial (grounded in claims of universal domination)<sup>7</sup> and crusading.<sup>8</sup> Frequently, they were explicitly directed against the French royal dynasty and court.<sup>9</sup> The Habsburg dynasty was purported to be destined for world domination owing to its special mission of uniting the newly resurgent 'German nation',<sup>10</sup> the Empire and Christianity for a super-mission, in comparison with which all wars between European powers were but minor quibbles. That super-mission was the eschatological struggle with the Turk—the crusade, also a Burgundian ideological commonplace. The ideal role of the emperor was to unite and to defend Christendom and to protect the Church and the Pope, while the actual policies aimed to co-opt the Church and the Papacy to work for the emperor where possible, and to expand his influence without being in the least subservient to either.

The critique of the French royal policy in Maximilian's political messages proceeded, as had to be expected, from the territorial interests of the dynasty, but was increasingly given a new discursive spin: his opposition to the king of France was presented as struggle with a false, heretical and tyrannical power that stood in the way of the emperors, obstructing

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<sup>7</sup> Georg Wagner, 'Maximilian I. und die politische Propaganda' (see n. 1), pp. 33f. For a general survey of the origins, development and ideological functions of the topos of universal monarchy in Renaissance Europe, see Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas* (New haven, 1993), and Frances Yeates, *Astraea: the imperial theme in the sixteenth century* (London, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Hollegger, 'Erwachen und aufstehen als ein starker stryter' (see n. 1), p. 234, with references to a more detailed treatment of this subject in Edeltraut Hönig, *Kaiser Maximilian I. als politischer Publizist*, unpublished dissertation (Graz 1970). For an example of the ways in which the idea of crusade was interwoven with the dynasty's territorial and imperial concerns and military policies and with related diplomatic rhetoric, see Manfred Hollegger, 'Die Grundlinien der Außenpolitik Maximilians I. und der Wormser Reichstag von 1495—Kaiser, Reich, Reformen. Der Reichstag zu Worms, exhibition catalogue, (Koblenz, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Manfred Hollegger, 'Erwachen und aufstehen als ein starker stryter' (see n. 1), pp. 232ff.

<sup>10</sup> On this, see Alfred Schröcker, *Die Deutsche Nation. Beobachtungen zur politischen Propaganda des ausgehenden 15. Jahrhunderts*, Historische Studien 426 (Lübeck, 1974).



their sacred mission of freeing the Christian world from the infidels. Manfred Hollegger quotes an anonymous letter distributed (apparently with Maximilian's active approval) at the Imperial Diet of Konstanz in 1507, which illustrates the nature of such rhetoric. The argumentation strategy of the letter is built around the topos of faithlessness of the French. As proof of such faithlessness, the letter mentions the failure of the French royal family to keep their promises regarding dynastic marriages of Maximilian's daughter Margarethe to the French king (and of Maximilian to the duchess of Brittany, who was ultimately snatched by the French and substituted for Margarethe). These dynastic recriminations are transformed in Maximilian's letter into proofs of the French nation's rebellion against God and his sacraments, against justice, against Christian morality and Christian faith as such. Was not marriage, after all, a sacrament of the Church, and did not the French king show in what disregard he held that sacrament? The same letter accused France of attempting to overturn the institutional hierarchies of Christian world by trying to snatch the procedure of imperial election away from the electors and the papal election away from the cardinals.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, attempts to influence the election of the head of the Holy Roman Empire were a diplomatic norm for the dynasties of Western Europe around 1500, of which Maximilian and his advisors were well aware. Accusing France of meddling in imperial affairs was no more than a statement of fact, but it was presented as a major breach of hierarchy and morality—and therefore a proof of the un-Christian nature of French royal policies.

Presenting such claims regarding the failings of the dynasty's opponents required a parallel representation of the Habsburg rulers as morally competent and eschatologically destined to set things right. The development of Maximilian's self-image progressively entailed attributing divine and mystical features to his person, which went well with the increasingly fantastic plans to claim the Papacy for the emperor (in 1511), thus uniting worldly and spiritual authority in his person, as it was assumed to have been once united in the person of the priest-king Johannes.<sup>12</sup> In view of such claims, what was the discursive framework for featuring Maximilian as a competent and successful monarch in the works of court historiography written in his lifetime?

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Hollegger, 'Erwachen und aufstehen als ein starker stryter' (see n. 1), pp. 232–3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 231.



*Maximilian's Court Historiography: A Problem of Form*

Maximilian's 'Burgundian experience' is generally seen as having had a profound influence on his ideological self-representation. Hermann Wiesflecker in his authoritative biography of the emperor seems to suggest simply that the court historiography and *Publizistik* of the Burgundian Netherlands had served as the model for Maximilian's literary patronage and dynastic propaganda.<sup>13</sup> That no outstanding works of historiography, similar to those of Chastelain or Molinet, were produced as a result, is explained by Wiesflecker by the mediocre talents of chronicle writers employed by Maximilian.<sup>14</sup> In an earlier publication, Wiesflecker states his idea of the Netherlandish-French origins of Maximilian's historiography with even greater conviction: according to him, when the monarch provided his secretaries and others with scraps of information for his biography, "he was thinking, no doubt, of that unique mixture of history and heroic romance that he had come to know from the example of French and Netherlandish chronicles, later embodied in an original way in his *Weisskunic*".<sup>15</sup>

While 'unique mixture of history and heroic romance' is an apt description for the fictionalised biography of the emperor entitled *Weisskunic*, it is rather far from describing the nature of Burgundian court historiography at the time when Maximilian could have encountered it. A reader of Chastelain and Molinet would easily notice that there are some prominent features in Burgundian court historiography around 1470–1500 that historical works produced in Germany under Maximilian's patronage and supervision never shared. Two of such features are particularly worth mentioning here: the critical distance that Burgundian court historiographers in the second half of the fifteenth century sometimes maintained towards the actions of their princes, and the relative emancipation of the genre of prose history from elements of literary fiction. Both of these features are relevant for understanding the difference between Maximilian's representation in the Netherlands and his representation in the works of his German court.

<sup>13</sup> Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I.* (see n. 3), V, p. 321 and pp. 452–3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

<sup>15</sup> Hermann Wiesflecker, *Joseph Grünpecks Commentaria und Gesta Maximiliani Romanorum regis. Die Entdeckung eines verlorenen Geschichtswerkes*. Inaugural lecture, Karl-Franzens-Universität in Graz (Graz, 1965).

The extent to which the work of Burgundian court historiographers incorporates, at times, a critical distance towards the deeds of their princes is not mirrored in the imaginative literary oeuvre of Maximilian and his court circle. While Chastelain and occasionally even Molinet had inserted critical passages in their chronicles or at least had indicated that not all actions of Charles the Bold were worthy of glorification, such striving for objectivity can hardly be attested in the works of court historiography glorifying Maximilian I. Grünpeck's earlier work *Gesta Maximiliani*, which has not reached us as a complete text, may have been grounded in the description of actual events to a greater extent than the later and more laudatory *Historia Friderici et Maximiliani*;<sup>16</sup> nevertheless, there seems to have been little in the way of critique of the ruler's actions there. The more fictionalised German biographical texts *Theuerdank*, *Freydal* and *Weisskunig* show even less tendency towards critical distance—which is understandable, given their genre.<sup>17</sup>

There is, besides, the question of genre itself. Burgundian court historians around 1470 had to a great extent emancipated their historical works from the direct infiltration of literary fiction,<sup>18</sup> while developing a repertoire of convoluted metaphors, allegories and allusions that brought them their sobriquet of *grands rhetoriqueurs*. A mixture of historical, political and fictional elements that one could find in the earlier Burgundian works, such as the *Geste des Ducs de Bourgogne* and the *Pastoralet*,<sup>19</sup> can be no longer traced in the chronicles of Chastelain and Molinet which purport to tell what they take to be the historical truth, enhanced now and then by a moralistic maxim or rhetorical flourish of some sort. Molinet may dwell at length on the parallels between Charles the Bold and a number of classical and biblical heroes, he may insert the most fantastic allegories in

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<sup>16</sup> This is a claim that Hermann Wiesflecker makes in *Joseph Grünpecks Commentaria und Gesta* (see n. 15).

<sup>17</sup> A profound analysis of all three from the point of view of literary and cultural history can be found in Jan-Dirk Müller, *Gedechnus* (see n. 5).

<sup>18</sup> A somewhat different view is presented in Frederik Buylaert and Jan Dumolyn, 'Shaping and reshaping the concepts of nobility and chivalry in Froissart and the Burgundian chroniclers', *The Fifteenth Century* (2010), pp. 59–83. This author does not wish to contradict the analysis of Buylaert and Dumolyn, but makes a distinction between the use of ritualised phrases, topoi and clichés on the one hand, and direct use of allegorical narrative as a substitute for chronicle on the other hand.

<sup>19</sup> On the *Geste* and the *Pastoralet* and their place in the forging of the Burgundian political ideology, see Jan R. Veenstra, 'Le prince qui se veult faire de nouvel roy': the Literature and Ideology of Burgundian Self-Determination, in Boulton and Veenstra, *The Ideology of Burgundy* (see Chapter I n. 6), pp. 206–7.

his text, but he does not digress so far as to begin to present the actions of the duke in a fictional setting. This relative purity of genre is not shared by Maximilian's court historiography: the veneer of literary fiction is essential for the imaginary histories of Maximilian's life in *Theuerdank* or *Weisskunig*, just as it had once been for the *Pastoralet*. It is, thus, not every kind of Burgundian influence (and not the most advanced and recent type, one should add) that Maximilian's literary apparatus takes over.

This difference can be, perhaps, traced back to Maximilian's personal selection, rather than to the limited merits of his court chroniclers. Wiesflecker himself indicates that the ageing ruler showed ultimately little enthusiasm for Joseph Grünpeck's multiple efforts to write his Latin biography,<sup>20</sup> preferring to cooperate with Marx Treitzsaurwein on the development and embellishment of fictionalised histories of his life such as *Weisskunig*. This is understandable in the context of Maximilian's personal experience. Some passages in another Latin text, this time by Cuspinian, reveal the emperor's bitterness at the incompleteness and irrelevance of the education he had received at home.<sup>21</sup> Having arrived at the Burgundian court in the Netherlands as a very young man with haphazard education, he was easily fascinated by the most visible layers of Burgundian court culture,<sup>22</sup> its splendour and its cult of chivalry. This does not go to say that the first Habsburg ruler of Burgundian Netherlands did not give attention to studying political institutions and Burgundian principles of government: comments on the margins of his personal copy of Charles's military ordinances show that he probably did.<sup>23</sup> It seems however that his brush with Burgundian literary culture did not include the more recent works of court historiography, or if it did, that encounter left little trace in his own programme of literary self-glorification initiated

<sup>20</sup> Wiesflecker, *Joseph Grünpecks Commentaria* (see n. 15), pp. 13–14.

<sup>21</sup> Fragment in German translation published in Inge Wiesflecker-Friedhuber (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte Maximilians I in seiner Zeit*, *Ausgewählte Quellen zur Deutschen Geschichte der Neuzeit*, XIV (Darmstadt, 1996), pp. 33–4.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance Maximilian's letter to Sigmund Püschken, in Wiesflecker-Friedhuber, *Quellen* (see n. 21), p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> See Susan Marti's article on Cat. Nr. 48 (Military ordinances of Charles the Bold from the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna) in: Susan Marti, Till-Holger Borchert and Gabriele Keck (eds.), *Charles le Temeraire*, exhibition catalogue, Historisches Museum, Bern (Bern and Brussels, 2008), p. 221. On Maximilian's dependence on Charles as a political and cultural model, see Heinz Notflatscher, 'Maximilian im Kreis der Habsburger', in Georg Schmidt-von Rhein (ed.), *Kaiser Maximilian I. Bewahrer und Reformator*, exhibition catalogue (Ramstein, 2002), p. 41.

in the last decade of his reign.<sup>24</sup> Maximilian's taste in history-writing shows little affinity with the style of the *rhétoriciens*. Of the known histories written under his patronage and with his direct involvement, only the Latin works of Grünpeck seem to belong to the genre of 'pure' historiography, without admixture of heroic romance.

Another genre of court historiography that was equally popular in Burgundy before 1477 and at Maximilian's court in Inner Austria was the dynastic genealogy. Frederick III had sponsored considerable effort in that field, as had Philip the Good. The most outstanding result of Philip's patronage, *Chronique des roys*, enjoyed its heyday after the change of dynasty: at least five early printed editions from the early 1500s are known.<sup>25</sup> The chronicle in question played an important role in bolstering the Burgundian-Habsburg identity in the context of developing anti-French rhetoric—however, it provides little evidence in the way of interpretation of current political actions, and will thus be left out of the present study.

### *The Form and the Message*

Around 1500, arguments about the generic usefulness of *historia* named two more or less articulated and discrete purposes of history-writing: creating a collection of exempla for the purpose of moral teaching and providing an arsenal of rules for those engaged in politics.<sup>26</sup> The following analysis is concerned particularly with the way the second purpose is reflected in works of history glorifying Maximilian.

Some of the histories in question had the explicit purpose of instructing future Habsburg rulers by the example of Maximilian. This is the case, in particular, with the *Historia Friderici et Maximiliani*, dedicated by Grünpeck to the future Charles V. In this sense, it can be compared to the memoirs of Olivier de La Marche, dedicated to Philip the Fair and relating the glories of previous generations of Burgundian dukes for his benefit. The similarity ends here. While La Marche is relating his own impressions of political events that had passed before his eyes, Grünpeck is basing his

<sup>24</sup> On Maximilian's 'publishing plan' developed in cooperation with Treitzsaurwein, see Gerhard Benecke, *Maximilian I, an analytical biography* (London and Boston, 1982), pp. 16–23.

<sup>25</sup> Graeme Small, 'Of Burgundian Dukes, Counts, Saints and Kings', in Boulton and Veenstra, *The Ideology of Burgundy* (see Chapter I, n. 6), pp. 151–187.

<sup>26</sup> Müller, *Gedechtnus* (see n. 5), p. 90.

narrative on scraps of information once dictated by the emperor and on the evidence he had managed to collect from those who would be willing to tell him something of Maximilian's earlier years. Moreover, while La Marche's *memoires* can be viewed as an attempt to ensure the continuity of Burgundian traditions despite the change of dynasty, the implicit purpose of Grünpeck is to glorify the Austrian and German origins of the dynasty and to bind the future Charles V, a Burgundian Netherlander by upbringing, to these origins. Charles, however, seems to have chosen La Marche's allegorical elegy of the Burgundian past, *Le Chevalier délibéré*, as leisure reading to console him in his retirement at the end of his days, rather than Grünpeck's apologies of his Habsburg ancestors.<sup>27</sup>

The difference between historiography written at Maximilian's court in Austria and that written at the court of his predecessors and his children in the Netherlands was not limited to the field of the aesthetic: in fact, the aesthetic in this case influences the rhetorical framework, and the latter shapes the message, also in matters related to normative models of statecraft. Different messages in the treatment of the same events are less evident if one compares the chronicle of Molinet and the histories written by Maximilian's German historiographer Grünpeck. In the fictional history projects developed later in cooperation with Treitzsaurwein, the deviation from the Burgundian model of political competence is much more visible.

Let us compare at first the way in which Molinet and Grünpeck describe the same event: the imprisonment of Maximilian, king of the Romans, by his rebellious subjects in Bruges.

Molinet's description of the episode is more detailed by far, to the extent of almost losing focus on the subject in hand: he paints a complex picture of accidents, bad intentions and private actions that come together in the story of Maximilian's humiliation by his opponents from Ghent and by the craft guilds of Bruges. The root of the problem is both the wickedness of the subjects and the misdeeds of ducal officers. The rebels in Ghent and Bruges are certainly viewed as for the most part erring and incompetent people: they are '*testes folles*' capable of '*erreurs et folle*

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<sup>27</sup> See Joseph-Marie Kervin de Lettenhove (ed.), *Commentaires de Charles Quint* (Brussels, 1862), pp. xviii–xix, and Alfred Kohler (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte Karls V*, *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte der Neuzeit*, XV (Darmstadt, 1990), p. 483 ('Bestandsverzeichnis der Schmucksachen, Garderobe und Einrichtungsgegenstände Karls V. In San Jeronimo de Yuste, 1558').

*opinion*'.<sup>28</sup> But Maximilian's officials are not exactly the paragons of virtue either, and the Members of Flanders are shown to have justified doubts as to their integrity: '... by the mutability of war, enormous sums of money, almost millions, were raised in Flanders, of which they (the Members of Flanders) wished to receive account, for they thought that the king was not aware of all of that money, but that some governors, as it was said, had used them for their private profit'.<sup>29</sup> The representation of incompetent and abusive behaviour of the king's officials in this passage fits precisely into the discursive framework developed by the burghers of the Flemish cities in their arguments with comital authority: '*prouffit singulier*', a key topos semantically opposed to '*bien publique*', was commonly referred to in contexts when accusations of abuse of power by the ruler's officers in Flanders were framed.<sup>30</sup>

To this picture of bad intentions and institutional abuse, the moralistic message of the chronicler is added: even the great are not immune from the mutability of Fortune.<sup>31</sup> Maximilian may be 'infallible successor of the world's monarchy', yet if Fortune wills so, he is constrained to 'salute, beg and entreat miserable folks of low condition'.<sup>32</sup> The reasons that have led to this may be of a practical nature (and they are described in great detail), but they have to retreat to the background when a moral lesson is extracted from political experience. Maximilian's moral or political competence is not put into doubt for a single moment, but that of his German troops and his officers is questionable. At the same time, his reputation remains untainted, since it is not to the members of the shoemaker guild of Bruges, but to the implacable goddess Fortuna that he owes his humiliation.

For Grünpeck, the Bruges episode requires first and foremost a condemnation of the actions of those who put the king into the degrading

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<sup>28</sup> Jean Molinet, *Chroniques* (see Ch. I n. 33), I, p. 582. For a good analysis of the image of rebels in Burgundian-Netherlandish chronicles, see Jan Dumolyn, '“Criens and shouters”. The discourse on radical urban rebels in late medieval Flanders', *Journal of Social History*, 42 (1), (2008).

<sup>29</sup> '*... par mutation de la guerre, innumerables deniers, quasy par millions, s'estoyent levéz en Flandres, desquelz ilz (the Members) volloyent avoir le compte, pensant que tous n'estoyent venus à la cognoissance du roy; mais aucuns gouverneurs, comme ils disoyent, les attribuoyent à leur prouffit singulier...*'. Molinet, *Chroniques* (see Ch. I n. 33), I, p. 583.

<sup>30</sup> Jan Dumolyn, 'Privileges and novelties: the political discourse of the Flemish cities and rural districts in their negotiations with the dukes of Burgundy (1348–1506)', *Urban History*, 35 (1), 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Molinet, *Chroniques* (see Ch. I n. 33), I, p. 592.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

condition of imprisonment. The emphasis of blame, however, shifts between different versions of his Latin biography of the ruler. In the earlier *Gesta Maximiliani*, the cruelty and senselessness of the intimidation and repressions undertaken by the rebellious craftsmen of Bruges and Ghent are in the centre of the story.<sup>33</sup> Not only are they wrong, having rebelled against their lawful lord, they are also characterised as violent and cruel people, which explains their handling of Maximilian and his courtiers. In *Historia Friderici et Maximiliani* it is the fault of courtiers who have wasted the taxes exacted in greater quantities than before from the populace, that the king became hostage to popular outrage. Grünpeck alludes to the fact that some of those guilty had actually suffered inadvertently from the consequences of their mismanagement, as they numbered among the victims of the angry people of Bruges.<sup>34</sup> Maximilian's predicament, then, is at least to some extent the result of incompetent management of political institutions, even though the blame for that incompetence is not laid directly at his door. This is the perspective that disappears entirely from the picture of Maximilian's immaculate statesmanship painted later in the *Weisskunig*.

The question of Maximilian's political competence on the whole is somewhat problematic in *Historia*. While Grünpeck's narrative is intended to leave the reader with no doubts concerning the question whether Maximilian was virtuous, the answer to the question whether he was successful is ambiguous at best. The *Historia* contains many examples of his failures. His excessive friendliness with his soldiers occasionally provokes bad discipline and riots;<sup>35</sup> his courtiers' incompetent handling of taxation policies is shown to cause full-scale rebellion.<sup>36</sup> His sense of justice, that utmost virtue in the Burgundian state ideology, is volatile: Grünpeck's text seems to suggest that altercations between severity and mercy towards guilty subjects depended to some extent on his mood.<sup>37</sup> At some points, he seems to be the plaything of Fortune,<sup>38</sup> which inflicts sufferings upon him.

<sup>33</sup> Reproduced in Wisflecker-Fiedhuber, *Quellen* (see n. 21), pp. 47–50.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Grünpeck, *Die Geschichte Friedrichs III und Maximilians I* (*Historia Friderici et Maximiliani*), translated by Ch. Ilgen (Leipzig, 1891).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 33.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 31.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 35.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 43. The image of Fortune as the only power before which a noble hero can admit his defeat is central to the culture of Western European elites in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, from the poetry of Charles d'Orléans to the works of Macchiavelli.



The fashionable image of a long-suffering secular martyr, coveted by many late medieval nobles including La Marche,<sup>39</sup> is very much part of Maximilian's self-image. Grünpeck attempts to balance out the negative impression by stating that Maximilian is at the same time fortunate in battles,<sup>40</sup> and extremely hard-working<sup>41</sup>—a feature that may have become prestigious owing to the example of Charles the Bold. On the whole, however, the episodes signifying Maximilian's failure or incompetence are slightly too numerous in Grünpeck's biography—which seems to have led to some doubts on behalf of the emperor, whether this project was indeed a worthy work of glorification.<sup>42</sup> Maximilian saw to it, that in the *Weisskunig* a more perfect picture was presented.

### *Weisskunig: Politics into Fiction*

If the works of Grünpeck and Molinet can be tentatively placed in the same (historical) genre, this cannot be said of the later histories of Maximilian embodied in the *Theuerdank* and the *Weisskunig*. In them, fictional characters, often broadly modelled on historical figures without adhering too much to the details of their lives, enact before the readers' eyes ideal models pure and simple, without the limitations presented by political and social reality. Thus, Weisskunig is crowned by the Pope, because Maximilian saw it as just and desirable that his imperial status should have been confirmed by the pontiff. The fictional form of the work allows for such frivolities. Molinet, despite all his striving, could not ascribe to Charles the Bold the taking of Neuss.

Let us look in some detail at the way in which Maximilian's competence is presented in the *Weisskunig*.

### *Military Competence*

Military competence plays a crucial role in the self-representation of Maximilian in the *Weisskunig*. In the chapters dedicated to the young White King's education, the acquisition of military skills is described in

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<sup>39</sup> Olivier de La Marche's motto was '*Tant a souffert La Marche*'.

<sup>40</sup> Grünpeck, *Historia Friderici et Maximiliani* (see n. 34), Chapter 46.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 44.

<sup>42</sup> Ilgen's German edition of *Historia Friderici et Maximiliani*, published in 1891 (see n. 34), indicates a number of places in the manuscript where parts of chapters describing Maximilian's political troubles were crossed out, possibly by Maximilian's hand.



great detail, as in the following passage dealing with the way the young king acquires the art of building temporary encampments from wagons (*Wagenburg*): 'He learns how to make a *Wagenburg*, so that when he comes to rule, he knows how to conquer his enemies, and he has with him some old brave officers, who were good at building such encampments.'<sup>43</sup> Before the young king sets out to marry the orphaned queen of Fewreysen ('Firesteel', an emblematic name for Burgundy), his father sends him to acquire military experience in battle: 'For the following reason: so that when you come to rule the Queen's land, you will know how to set out against your enemies.'<sup>44</sup> Needless to say, the advice proves useful—as most of the remaining chapters of the *Weisskunig*, describing the hero's wars with various external and internal enemies, amply demonstrate.

The *Weisskunig* is a peculiar example of the *Fürstenspiegel* genre.<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, it follows the framework of a manual to government, but on the other hand, it uses the fictional form to set new accents that partly contradict the consensus of late medieval political lore regarding the overarching value of peace. Military success is so crucial a part of a ruler's competence in the *Weisskunig* that some virtues that were considered to have intrinsic value in medieval mirrors of the princes, in this text are only instrumental and used in order to achieve military might. Thus, a seemingly altruistic character trait such as kindness towards subjects (*Miltigkeit*) is instrumental: when the old king sees his son, the young White King, to distribute all his money among his retainers, he says that every king should be kind, but not quite so kind. To which the young king answers: 'I wish not to be a king of money, but a king of (my) people'.<sup>46</sup> This well-meaning maxim is then followed by the pragmatic explanation: 'for every king fights and wins victories over his enemies with people, and not with money'.<sup>47</sup> Kindness as such may be a nice attribute, but the

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<sup>43</sup> 'Er lernet die Wagenburg machen, damit Er in seiner Regierung, seine veindt desterpas wisset zu überwynnnden, und het alt tapfer hauptleut bey Ime, die in den wagenburgen kunstlichen waren.' [Maximilian I and Marx Treitsaurwein], *Der Weiß Kunig* (Vienna, 1775), p. 101.

<sup>44</sup> 'Aus der ursach, wann du kumest, in Regirung der kunigin landt, das du dich destpas, gegen deinen veindten wissest zuschicken.' Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> On the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition at the time of Maximilian (including the *Weisskunig* itself), see Bruno Singer, *Die Fürstenspiegel in Deutschland im Zeitalter des Humanismus und der Reformation: bibliographische Grundlagen und ausgewählte Interpretationen* (Munich, 1981).

<sup>46</sup> 'Ich wirdt nit werden, ain kunig des gelts, sonder ich wil werden, ein kunig des volcks'.

<sup>47</sup> 'ain neder kunig bestreit und bekriegt mit dem volck, und nit mit gelt, seine veindt'. *Der Weiß Kunig* (see n. 43), p. 72.

explanation shows that its moral value is less important than its usefulness for obtaining military victories.

As in matters of relations with the subjects, discussed below, also in war the keeping of secrets is an important element of competence as described in the *Weisskunig*. Those who cannot keep a secret, can end up in military failure and worse. This happens to the count of Fürstenberg, whose plans of military attack become known to the Swiss, and they attack him first and kill him.<sup>48</sup> In the discourse of statesmanship represented by the author(s) of the *Weisskunig*, a lack of secrecy is nothing but sheer incompetence, and leads to failure.

### *Institutional Competence*

The arts that the young king learns have threefold function: the useful (*Nutzperkait* (usefulness) is the word that dominates the sentences describing his motivation for learning), the honourable and the aesthetic.<sup>49</sup> It is difficult sometimes to distinguish between the three, as 'honourable', 'chivalrous', 'useful', and 'artful' are epithets distributed quite freely in the discourse of Maximilian's representation.<sup>50</sup> Learning as such, however, has a strongly pragmatic bend. Thus, the old king tells the young one: 'Kings, who rule on their own, should know more than (lesser) princes and the people, so that they can keep their government to themselves.'<sup>51</sup> The narrator continues this passage by describing how the son followed this advice by observing the behaviour of people and reading old histories, learning about human nature and about people of various estates, in which pursuits 'with great industry he sought secret knowledge, how the world should be ruled'. And, the narrator hastens to add, that happened owing to the young king's gift of understanding, for otherwise he could not have acquired such knowledge from books alone. The passage is concluded with the statement that it is unnecessary to reveal the knowledge

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 269–70.

<sup>49</sup> On the aesthetic aspects of the way Maximilian's power is represented not only in the biographies, but also in the *Triumphzug* and *Ehrenpforte*, see Jan-Dirk Müller, *Gedechtnus* (see n. 5), pp. 150–4.

<sup>50</sup> Epithets such as '*lustig, mit gueten Eern, Ritterlich und schon, nach rechter Art, artlich, mit zucht nach Ritterlichem schimpf*', etc. are amply used also in other projects glorifying Maximilian in his lifetime. Müller, *Gedechtnus* (see n. 5), p. 151.

<sup>51</sup> '*So muessen doch die kunig, die selbs regieren, mehr wissen, dann die fursten und das volck, damit das Ir Regirung bey Inen beleib.*'

that he had gained to the readers, for such secret knowledge pertains only to kings—*‘dann es gehoert allein den kunigen zu.’*<sup>52</sup>

There are obvious medieval influences reflected in this passage. For one, a reference to Pseudo-Aristotle, the *Secretum secretorum*, the founding text of the *Fürstenspiegel tradition*, would not be out of place.<sup>53</sup> What is more important in the context of the present study, however, is the paradigmatic difference between the insistence on the closed nature of political knowledge demonstrated by *Weisskunig*,<sup>54</sup> and the insistence on the demonstrable and public nature of the prince’s striving for the public good in the way political discourse had been framed in late Burgundian historiography. This does not go to say that the Burgundians often insist that all political knowledge should be public. La Marche demonstratively claims to leave to the princes their particularly dubious deeds, such as the dealings between Louis XI and Charles the Bold over the fate of the count of St Pol.<sup>55</sup> Chastelain, too, sometimes refers to ‘secret reasons’ when the actions of Charles the Bold are otherwise hard to justify.<sup>56</sup> But overall, the Burgundian historians tend to invent ways to explain, why certain actions of the rulers and their officers were conducive to the public good, as Molinet does when he takes pains to prove that the military exuberance of Charles the Bold was in the end beneficial to the *chose publique*. So does Chancellor Hugonet in his public speeches to the Estates. In *Weisskunig*, the essence of government is in the rulers’ success and honour per se, and while it is said that the skills they acquire are good for preserving their power (*damit das Ir Regirung bey Inen beleib*), further goals of government are mentioned relatively seldom. Thus the process of acquisition of political competence reverts to the notion of mystery, the competence itself becoming a kind of grace accessible to kings and remaining entirely limited to their secret counsels.

<sup>52</sup> *Der Weiß Kunig* (see n. 43), p. 64.

<sup>53</sup> See M. A. Manzalaoui, *Secretum secretorum: nine English versions*, Vol. 1, Early English Text Society No. 276 (Oxford, 1977).

<sup>54</sup> Further instances of the same can be found in the text, e.g. when the young king learns Spanish in order to conduct secret negotiations with the king of Spain, *Der Weiß Kunig* (see n. 43), p. 120.

<sup>55</sup> *‘De ceste morte je ne quier gueres parler: car je ne l’apreuve, ne contredy & en laisse faire aux nobles Princes dessusdicts, qui en ordonnerent à leur plaisir.’* La Marche/Antoine (see Ch. I, n. 44) pp. 587–8.

<sup>56</sup> Chastelain, *Chronique* (see Ch. I, n. 63), p. 463.

One of the few instances when the purpose of government is connected to the welfare of the subjects is the description of the White King acquiring the knowledge of minting and coins:

...[B]ecause he observed himself the usefulness that could come from it, this king had the best coins minted from silver and gold, above any other king, and no king could be his equal in matters of minted coins, which came alone from his art and experience. The same young king had, in his realms, all bad and foreign coins prohibited for use, and in many places instituted new good mints and had coins made, which was of especially great use to his people, and increased their wealth, and also his treasury was greatly enhanced through it.<sup>57</sup>

Financial shrewdness and sound monetary policy are shown here as serving both the public good and the prince's magnificence.

Bordering on institutional competence, also discursive competence is important in *Weisskunig*. Linguistic skills especially are emphasised as instruments of government. The young king learns the language of his new bride (which, for political reasons, is called not French but Burgundian) and also Flemish—both in order to rule his new land more effectively and in order to earn the trust of his new subjects. Because he learned Flemish, the narrator tells us, the young king's Netherlandish subjects 'were well pleased, and bore through that a special liking for him'.<sup>58</sup> He also learns English in order to speak to the English mercenaries,<sup>59</sup> and then Spanish and Italian. As a result, he can speak to seven of his commanders in seven different languages<sup>60</sup>—and thus can maintain, as we can see from the fact that he learned Spanish for secret negotiations, an advantage over them. Few can rival his linguistic skills and thus have access to the same information.

Remarkably often, the young king learns skills of various nature from people of high and low estate—military captains, craftsmen and even peasants. When he goes forth to rule, however, his interaction with other political actors is reduced to the dichotomy of loyal followers and enemies. There are no institutional partners with whom political compromise can be negotiated—as it was in Molinet's version of Maximilian's story. In the *Weisskunig*, the interaction with rebellious subjects is more or less limited to military clashes and suppression, followed either by repentance (on

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<sup>57</sup> Translated from *Der Weiß Kunig* (see n. 43), p. 81.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

behalf of the rebels) or by executions of the particularly stubborn trouble-makers (the pictures of battles and executions in the illustrations to *Weisskunig* are far more numerous than the representations of negotiations or assemblies of any sort).

The young king's various opponents are all given heraldic colour-coded names, standing for political figures and groups that opposed Maximilian's rule in the Netherlands. The king usually defeats them, even though their viciousness provides for some trouble. The simplistic dichotomy of White King and Black Company (this heraldic term used for the Ghenters, who presented in 1487–88 the main opposition to Maximilian's regency) reflects the way in which the conflict of interests in the Netherlands is represented in the emperor's prolific self-glorification. Maximilian's court histories written in the Empire are remarkably devoid of the complexity of legal and political argumentation used by his opponents in Ghent—for instance, by Guillaume Zoete, who addressed the Estates General several times in 1488, claiming that Maximilian had violated a political contract of sorts by not caring sufficiently for the *bien publique*.<sup>61</sup>

Instead of a number of institutional actors with their own complex motivations that we see in Molinet's chronicle, coming into conflict over a real abuse of power, the *Weisskunig* tells us a simple story of betrayal, of evil influence of foreign potentates and of the populace led astray by traitors, but soon brought back to reason.<sup>62</sup> The disturbance, we are told, was caused by the Blue King (the king of France), who bribed one of the White King's captains who distributed money and false promises to 'wicked people', including some 'great shouters' among them. They were promised high offices and lordships that would be theirs to hold. The traitors soon decided that it was impossible for them to achieve that goal, as long as the White King was alive. Therefore they invited him with sweet and false words to a city (Bruges), and imprisoned him and his loyal councillors. However, most of them were aware their cause was not right, and they did not dare to kill him. Afterwards, they released him. Taking heart, the White Company sent for help to his friends (this implies the emperor and the Imperial Estates, but only the euphemism 'friends' is used), and began to attack the enemies in various places.

<sup>61</sup> Jan Dumolyn, Jelle Haemers, "Les bonnes causes du peuple *pour se révolter*". *Libertés urbaines et luttes de pouvoir aux Pays-Bas méridionaux (1488)*, conference paper, 2009, [http://www.historiaurbium.org/english/Conference%202009/Dumolyn\\_Haemers.pdf](http://www.historiaurbium.org/english/Conference%202009/Dumolyn_Haemers.pdf), last accessed on 10.09.2010.

<sup>62</sup> The following story is related in *Weisskunig* (see n. 43), pp. 225–6.

This summary of the events surrounding the captivity of Bruges is a telling example of the way Maximilian's interaction with representative bodies of subjects is dealt with in the *Weisskunig*. The institutional complexity of the Netherlands and the Empire is reduced to a simple scheme of 'companies' of contrasting colours, ones fighting together with the hero, others fighting against him and usually losing.

Politics becomes a chequered field in which white and black companies battle for advantage. The rules of the game are mysterious and inaccessible to laymen, remaining limited to the knowledge of princes. Instead of a series of conflicts and compromises of overwhelming institutional and political complexity, a series of battles between the White King and his wicked enemies emerges. The White King is supremely competent in the political field, but the field itself becomes a fiction.

*The Burgundian Model and Maximilian's Model: Common Denominators*

Despite all of these differences, however, there are still some similarities between the normative models developed in the Burgundian Netherlands and those promoted in the *Theuerdank* and the *Weisskunig*. Military, institutional and discursive competence, although interpreted differently, remains important also in Maximilian's court historiography. There are other similarities beside that: *Weisskunig* sends 'gelert leut' (learned persons) to search in monasteries and other religious foundations for information about the origins of princely and royal houses and insists on those findings being written down.<sup>63</sup> So does Philip the Good, when he sends Hugues de Tolins to Burgundy proper to search for forgotten Burgundian royal and saintly connections.<sup>64</sup> Both have a certain personal interest in the outcome, which is more or less predictable: 'through such inquiries he traced his own male line from one father to the next up to Noah, which otherwise would have been in oblivion, and old writings, unheeded, would have been lost'.<sup>65</sup> Like the Burgundians, also *Weisskunig* cherishes the memory of past rulers, both Christian and pagan, inadvertently indicating for himself and for others what kind of deeds are worth remembering:

And where a king or a prince had made a foundation, that was forgotten, he revived the foundation in his memory... Long ago the unbelievers and

<sup>63</sup> *Der Weiß Kunig* (see n. 43), pp. 225f.

<sup>64</sup> Graeme Small, 'Of Burgundian Dukes, Counts, Saints and Kings' (see n. 25), p. 159.

<sup>65</sup> *Der Weiß Kunig* (see n. 43), pp. 225f.

namely the great lords of those (unbelievers) according to their habit had all kinds of memorials made, which were then later destroyed through war or through other things, and where such memorials were shown to the young Weisskunig, he commanded to restore that memory anew . . . In a similar way he had the good deeds of every emperor, king and prince that had reigned from the beginning of time until his day, described anew for remembrance. What a kingly, honourable mind had this young wise king! He surpassed all other kings, for where is it written of other kings that they have so raised the glory of royal and princely lines . . . through written memory?<sup>66</sup>

We can assume from this passage that royal and princely religious foundations and other efforts to keep alive the memory of rulers, especially efforts leaving material and written traces, are in themselves foremost among 'good deeds' that a ruler can undertake—and they are enough to allow him to 'surpass all other kings'.

Weisskunig enjoys remarkable popularity among far-flung nations, who send their embassies to his court—and in that he is similar to Charles the Bold, who is careful to uphold his reputation in the face of 'the nations of the world', according to Chastelain.<sup>67</sup> The feature is too generic to be seen as a borrowing from the Burgundian repertory: receiving embassies from exotic lands was a flattering attention and the ultimate sign of grandeur enjoyed in equal measure by King Solomon and Louis XIV. It is tempting, however, to draw a parallel between Weisskunig receiving embassies from far-off lands in the midst of his regal splendour, and Charles the Bold doing so in the 'magnificence' of his camp by Neuss (in a famous description in Molinet's chronicle).

The Burgundian obsession with crusading vows is shared by another alter-ego of Maximilian. Theuerdank resolves to embark on a crusade following an angelic vision, but we do not see him in action—an alteration was made to the plot as a result of his prototype's failure to mount a crusade against the Ottomans.<sup>68</sup> On the whole, however, the religious theme is given little prominence of place in Maximilian's court historiography.

Just as in the summaries of the qualities of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold in the works of Chastelain, Molinet and La Marche, Maximilian's relations with the church and personal piety play a relatively little role in Grünpeck's narrative in *Historia*. Maximilian's virtues (military prowess, learning, clemency, affability) are shown as proceeding from his

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Chastelain, *Chronique* (see Ch. I, n. 63), p. 461.

<sup>68</sup> Müller, *Gedechnus* (see n. 5), p. 111.

individuality rather than from a zealous exercise of religion. The same can be said for *Weisskunig*. In the latter, the episodes involving the Pope have everything to do with prestige (as in the chapters where the king's father is crowned emperor and married) and rather little to do with piety. The institutional efforts of kings in the religious field are appreciated (as when Weisskunig traces the historical foundations of monasteries by kings and princes), but internal piety is mentioned only by the way, or not at all—exactly in the same way as it was omitted from La Marche's summary of the achievements of Philip the Good. Despite its divergence from the Burgundian model, Maximilian's model of political competence as presented in his court historiography was equally secular, both in the way the purposes of government were interpreted and in the way the prince's achievements were characterised.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE RISE OF THE CONFESSIONAL MODEL

#### *Foreshadowing the Change: Institutio principis Christiani*

At the time when Maximilian and his courtiers were taking delight in the accomplishments of the White King, the model of political competence they laboured to bolster was about to come under attack from intellectuals who came from outside their circle. This time, it was not the ruler's behaviour that was censored by well-meaning critics, but the Burgundian model of statesmanship itself.

The most notable text in which the initial direction of this critique can be traced is the *Institutio principis Christiani*, written by Erasmus of Rotterdam when he was deeply and intimately involved with the court of Maximilian's successors in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> To anyone reading the mirror of the princes written by Erasmus in conjunction with texts discussing aspects of virtuous government written during the Burgundian period, the contrast should be self-evident. It can be summarised in three major points. First, the Erasmian prince is admonished to internalise the expressions of piety that his predecessors were allowed to maintain as predominantly external functions. Second, he is called to reject the models of princely glory based on the example of conquerors, such as Alexander and Caesar. And finally, the role of the princes as the guarantors of successful development and prosperity of political communities is first cast in doubt and later confirmed, but within a completely different paradigm. Princes have to be humble and control themselves in order not to impede the peace and flourishing of the communities they rule.

The first of these points of difference, embedded in the Christian thinking of Erasmus, is usually attributed the influence of *devotio moderna*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Ribhegge, 'Erasmus von Rotterdam und der burgundische Hof', in: Chantal Grell, Werner Paravicini and Jürgen Voss (eds.), *Les princes et l'histoire du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Bonn, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> The influence of *devotio moderna* on Erasmus has been pointed out in a large number of studies beginning with Paul Mestwerdt, *Die Anfänge des Erasmus: Humanismus und Devotio Moderna* (Leipzig, 1917). On *devotio moderna*, see Hein Blommestijn, Charles Caspers and Rijcklof Hofman (eds.), *Spirituality renewed. Studies on significant representatives of the Modern Devotion*, Studies in Spirituality, Supplements, 10 (Leuven, 2003).

The inner antagonism between the ambition, pomp and ceremony of the Burgundian court and the parallel existence of quiet communities of private citizens centred on spiritual and contemplative life has long been pointed out, not least by Huizinga.<sup>3</sup> The way Erasmus formulates his ideas concerning the Christian devotion of the prince suggests a direct critique of the Burgundian model of political competence: 'Do not think you have acquitted yourself well in the eyes of Christ, merely because you send a fleet against the Turks, or build a shrine or erect a little monastery somewhere.'<sup>4</sup> One only has to look back to La Marche's description of the achievements of Philip the Good,<sup>5</sup> or indeed to *Theuerdank* and *Weiskunig*, to see that these admonitions precisely put under attack the previous notion of princely piety that limited itself to external and institutional gestures. This change of attitude inevitably results in requiring a different set of examples and different qualities to be exhibited by the prince:

You have allied yourself with Christ—and yet will you slide back into the ways of Julius (Caesar) and Alexander the Great? You seek the same reward as the others, yet you will have no concern with His mandates. But on the other hand, do not think that Christ is found in ceremonies, in doctrines kept after a fashion, and in constitutions of the church. Who is truly Christian? Not he who is baptized or anointed, or who attends church. It is rather the man who has embraced Christ in the innermost feelings of his heart, and who emulates Him by his pious deeds. Guard against such inner thoughts as these: "Why is all this addressed to me? I am not a mere subject. I am not a priest. I am not a monk." Think rather in this fashion: "I am a Christian and a prince."<sup>6</sup>

This is more than a mere admonition to piety: by rejecting the very possibility of doubt whether princes should engage in the same practices of piety as Christians of more humble standing, remarkably priests and monks, Erasmus re-defines the competence of princes in the religious field. What was considered a necessary qualification for a humble subject or a good monk, but not for a prince, is now proposed as a necessary qualification for the prince too. The examples of pagan rulers of the classical age, those whose *virtù* Renaissance humanists and their allies in Burgundy had wished to follow, are therefore inappropriate. Erasmus was

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<sup>3</sup> Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, transl. by Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516). Translated by Lester K. Born (New York, 1963), pp. 153–4.

<sup>5</sup> See above, Chapter I, p.

<sup>6</sup> *The Education of a Christian Prince* (see n. 4), p. 153.

critical of the Burgundian choice of literature for the education of princes. According to him, 'a generally wilful boy' will without much difficulty turn into a violent ruler if he, protected by no antidote, reads of Achilles and Alexander the Great, or of Xerxes and Caesar.<sup>7</sup> This could well be a direct critique of the past mistakes of the educators of Charles the Bold, given that Erasmus was aware of the devastations that had followed the disaster of Nancy.

The purpose of government still remains the same, yet it is now bound up with the new paradigm of piety: 'There is no better way to gain the favor of God, than by showing yourself a beneficial prince for your people'.<sup>8</sup> Yet the role of princes in the prospering or decline of political communities is also reconsidered. If it had been clear for Chancellor Hugonet in 1473 that the flourishing of states has as its main source the wise and legitimate government of princes, Erasmus does not see the inevitability of such a connection: 'a state will always remain a state, even without a prince'. He reminds his readers that there have been flourishing states in Rome and Athens without princes. But, he continues, 'we often see states (*civitates*), well established and flourishing under the diligent activity of the people, overthrown by mismanagement of the princes'.<sup>9</sup> Burgundian dynastic history provided negative rather than positive examples for Erasmus. Musing on the happy alternative that had existed erstwhile or elsewhere through the election of princes, he seems to offer another critique of Charles the Bold: 'Seek rather a nature staid, in no way rash, and not so excitable that there is danger of his developing into a tyrant under the license of good fortune and casting aside all regard for advisers and counselors'.<sup>10</sup> One can also find a direct critique on the monetary policies of Charles and his successors in *Institutio principis Christiani*, in the chapter on tributes and taxes.<sup>11</sup>

A successful prince, for Erasmus, is somewhat like a good craftsman: 'The painter gets pleasure from a picture beautifully executed. The farmer, the gardener, the smith, all get pleasure from their work. What should bring more enjoyment to the prince than the contemplation of his country,

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<sup>7</sup> Wilhelm Ribhegge, 'Erasmus von Rotterdam und der burgundische Hof' (see n. 1), p. 381.

<sup>8</sup> *The Education of a Christian Prince* (see n. 4), p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

improved and more flourishing as a result of his efforts?'<sup>12</sup> In this down-to-earth vision, there is no place for exaggerated concepts of princely honour,<sup>13</sup> or, indeed, even for the concept of lese-majesty as injury to the sovereign, which had been crucial to the political thinking of the dynasty in the 1470ies.<sup>14</sup> According to Erasmus, it is not clear in what way an act of lese-majesty *per se* is injurious to the reputation of the prince.<sup>15</sup>

If the Renaissance notion of *virtù* was censored, what of the concomitant notion of princely magnificence? In the question of pomp and representation of the prince's power, less is more for Erasmus. Again, the main object of his critique is the Burgundian model. What for La Marche was a sign of greatness in Philip the Good (he had married off his nieces at his expense, and held a great household (*grand estat*), 'approaching that of a king'),<sup>16</sup> for Erasmus is a sign of wickedness. A conscientious prince, 'at the time when he wants to increase his court, to obtain an excellent alliance for his grand-daughter or his sister, ... to flaunt his wealth in the face of other nations by extended travels, should ponder again and again in his own mind how inhuman it is for so many thousands of men with their wives and children to starve to death'.<sup>17</sup> These lines have been read with approval by many a scholar of humanism; nevertheless, the humanist's moral engagement with the wellbeing of the subjects should not blind a historian of ideas to the fact that together with the pomp and ceremony of the Burgundian court (and, indeed, any court), Erasmus in fact rejects the institutional and contractual nature of politics.

Through its striving to define the humanist and Christian ideals of the new age, *Institutio principis Christiani* undermines the importance of institutions for maintaining the successful functioning of political communities. It presents the institutions of the state as examples of degeneration and abuse, as in the case of customs tax: according to Erasmus, 'the purpose for which this institution was created is now completely lost'.<sup>18</sup> This could be taken for a critique of corruption rather than of the institutions

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 185. Ribhegge notes that for Erasmus, statecraft is a profession (Beruf). Wilhelm Ribhegge, 'Erasmus von Rotterdam und der burgundische Hof' (see n. 1), p. 385.

<sup>13</sup> *The Education of a Christian Prince* (see n. 4), pp. 148–9.

<sup>14</sup> See Wim Blockmans, 'Crisme de leze magesté. Les idées politiques de Charles le Temeraire', in: J.-M. Duvosquel, J. Nazet, and A. Vanrie, eds., *Les Pays-Bas bourguignons. Histoire et institutions*, (Brussels, 1996), pp. 71–81.

<sup>15</sup> *Education of the Christian Prince* (see n. 4), p. 232.

<sup>16</sup> La Marche/Antoine (see Ch. I n. 44), p. 494.

<sup>17</sup> *Education of the Christian Prince* (see n. 4), p. 216.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

as such. But there is a deeper grudge against the discursive and institutional nature of politics in *Institutio*. For example, on the subject of treaties and contracts of every kind, Erasmus claims (with some inspiration from Cicero's *De Officiis*):

Among all Christian princes there is at once a very firm and holy bond because of the very fact that they are Christian. Why, then, is there a need to conclude so many treaties every day as if everyone were the enemy of everyone else and human agreements were essential to gain what Christ could not [accomplish]? When a matter is transacted through many written agreements, it is a proof that it is not done in good faith...<sup>19</sup>

From striving to make political motives pure and pious, a disdain for the contractual aspect of political arises. Its presence is evident in many paragraphs of the *Institutio*. Written agreements set down to regulate political affairs are morally suspect, as they do not attain the perfection of true harmony and brotherhood in Christ. Individuals with too much competence to interpret the laws are also morally suspect: '... let the laws be set forth in clear language with as few complexities as possible, so that there will be no urgent need for that most grasping type of man who calls himself "jurisconsult" and "advocate"'.<sup>20</sup> There is little or nothing in *Institutio* about dealing with representative bodies of subjects or cities—probably because Cicero and Aristotle, who did not live in an estates society, wrote nothing on the subject, and *Institutio* rarely engages with contemporary examples. Nevertheless it proceeds from the principles quoted above that institutional bargaining of the type that took place when the Members of Flanders reached an agreement with Maximilian after the Bruges captivity would not have been approved by Erasmus. The sense of such bargaining had been to obtain a compromise of complex interests, not to achieve Christian harmony, concerning which both the Members of Flanders and Maximilian may have had serious misgivings.

Wilhelm Ribhegge has claimed that *Institutio* contains modern notions of civil society, because the relations between a ruler and citizens are not those of unidirectional submission, and the commonwealth is seen not as a corporate body but as a family.<sup>21</sup> In fact, there is no contradiction between a corporate vision and paternalism (the Burgundian model had

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>21</sup> Wilhelm Ribhegge, 'Erasmus von Rotterdam und der burgundische Hof' (see n. 1), p. 386.

both, and so did the later political visions of Bodin and others). Instead of developing the corporate vision of society as a collection of social groups or 'estates' with distinct identity and interests, Erasmus collapses it into a blurred unity of a spiritual commonwealth which is contrary to any modern idea of a pluralist civil society.

It has been claimed that *Institutio* had profound impact on the development of modern states, 'courtly culture' as opposed to 'knightly culture' (though it is not clear how exactly), on the civilising process and even on the Enlightenment.<sup>22</sup> These claims deserve a separate discussion and some of them can be cast in serious doubt, but it is certain that while the young Charles V, the supposed addressee, paid little attention to the advice of *Institutio*, many of the future influential figures of Habsburg politics took heed of its ideas. Among those were Charles's younger brother Ferdinand (the future Ferdinand I) and his chancellor Mercurino of Gattinara.<sup>23</sup> It is Gattinara's vision of politics, as revealed in his memoirs, that best demonstrates the transformation of the Erasmian model of Christian political competence into a confessional model.

*The Birth of the Confessional Model in Habsburg Historiography:  
Mercurino of Gattinara*

Like Erasmus, Gattinara was a university-educated man and an organic intellectual par excellence, not only proceeding in his decisions from a certain normative discourse of politics, but also reinforcing that discourse by presenting his actions as adhering to it. He spent much time in the Franche Comté and in the Netherlands, serving the dynasty,<sup>24</sup> and had undoubtedly encountered there the vestiges of Burgundian political thinking. His political creed, however, was vastly different from that of Hugonet two generations earlier. It was shaped by the new conditions in which the dynasty and its officers found themselves: the need to uphold not only their status, but also their religious orthodoxy in the face of attacks of their opponents. Seriousness in Christian matters, which Erasmus had recommended to his prince, was revealing itself across Europe, but not as a harbinger of peace.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 396.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ilse Kodek (ed.), *Der Großkanzler Kaiser Karls V. zieht Bilanz. Die Autobiographie Mercurino Gattinaras aus dem Lateinischen übersetzt* (Münster, 2004), pp. 3–15.

Gattinara's autobiography has not usually been treated by researchers as a work of historiography but much more as evidence of the political creeds that informed the politics of Charles V during the period.<sup>25</sup> Nothing should disqualify it, however, from being considered a work of historiography—after all, La Marche had also been a ducal officer and not an official historian, yet no one has ever objected to his memoirs being included in the canon of Burgundian court historiography. The fact that Gattinara's text was not published during the period should not be decisive for this study, as the search here is for the contemporaries' models of political competence in the narratives of practical politics, and not for popular histories that had most immediate influence.

Chancellor Mercurino of Gattinara's autobiography, describing his political career and his role in the early reign of Charles V, presents a vision of politics as a field governed by divine interference rather than by human will. That was not a novelty—indeed, late fifteenth and early sixteenth century abounded in accounts of history viewed from that perspective, including texts considered 'modern', such as the memoirs of Commynes.<sup>26</sup> More importantly (and differently from Commynes and other Burgundians), for Gattinara the political field was subservient to religion and the Church as an institution, as in the following passage interpreting the meaning of victories that Charles had gained over France:

... so it seemed that the Highest, the Almighty himself had put also war and peace in the emperor's hand—probably not in order that he should put so many gifts and signs of grace given him by God to wrong use, but in order that he, after all excuses are done away with, could apply himself to the fostering and propagation of Christian religion... so as to bring peace and quiet to the Christians and to put an end to further shedding of Christian blood; so that he could direct his victorious hosts and conquering arms and banners against the enemies of the true Faith, the pagan Turks, against false Christians and heretics, and further to do everything that a Most Christian Emperor and Most Catholic King... should... to make the Throne of Peter even stronger.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> This is the approach of Ilse Kodek (see n. 24), but also of John Headley, *The Emperor and His Chancellor. A Study of the Imperial Chancellery Under Gattinara* (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> The most vehement (and overstated) defense of the modernity and novelty of Commynes' memoirs was made in Joel Blanchard, *Commynes l'Europeen. L'invention du politique*, Publications Romanes et Françaises, 216 (Geneva, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> A. Mercurino of Gattinara, translated from Kodek, *Der Großkanzler* (see n. 24), pp. 198–9.



Naturally, there are elements of continuity in this discourse, such as the goals of achieving peace and of combating the Turks that had been an ideological commonplace of Burgundian court historiography. But the entire emphasis on the prince as the guarantor of common good endowed with sufficient moral authority is displaced. It is only the subservience of political goals to religious ones that affirms a prince's moral position. To be politically competent, he has to be first and foremost a good Catholic.

This does not mean that Gattinara advocated a subservience of the emperor to the Pope in real terms: on the contrary, he took active part in the 'propaganda fight' between the two in 1526/7 on the side of the emperor.<sup>28</sup> There can be also no doubt that Gattinara's political ideas were broad enough and were not limited to a single notion of subservience of the state to the Church.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the subservience of the political field to the religious field was firmly established in Gattinara's political discourse, and future development of dynastic historiography shows that this principle was to remain central well into the seventeenth century.

#### *Institutional Competence and Confessional Competence*

Gattinara came from Northern Italy, yet his institutional culture was thoroughly Burgundian. From his experience as the servant of Maximilian and his heirs in the Franche Comté and also as a party in a legal process that took him to Malines where he had to plead his case before the Grand Conseil (the successor institution to the *parlement* of Charles the Bold), he was intimately familiar with the way the institutional system once developed by the Burgundian dukes had functioned, and was an active player in that system. His legal argumentation in the autobiography often proceeds from the political experience of the Burgundian state, which informs his outlook on the relations between the Habsburgs and France. Thus, when he explains how he knew in advance that the French king would go back on his promises as soon as Charles V released him from captivity, he says that his knowledge was not due to some occult practices, but because he remembered that: 'in the last hundred years, numerous treaties have been concluded between the French kings and the dukes of Burgundy, of which not a single one was kept by the French, but all were

<sup>28</sup> Kodek, *Der Grosskanzler* (see n. 24), p. 82.

<sup>29</sup> A good summary of these can be found in John M. Headley, 'Germany, the Empire and Monarchia in the Thought and Policy of Gattinara', in Heinrich Lutz (ed.), *Das römisch-deutsche Reich im politischen system Karls V.* (Munich and Vienna, 1982), pp. 15–33.



violated'.<sup>30</sup> This passage clearly identifies Charles V primarily as heir to the dukes of Burgundy.

In view of this background, it is not surprising that also for Gattinara, institutional competence plays an important role in the construction of the image of a successful politician—in this case, the chancellor's self-image. In his autobiography, the emphasis is on the competence involved in conducting negotiations and concluding treaties with foreign powers.<sup>31</sup> This is not a break with the dynastic tradition: also for Chastelain and La Marche, diplomatic relations of the dukes of Burgundy with other potentates had played a prominent role in the narratives of dynastic history, though they seldom went into details of backstage negotiations. The genre of the new humanist autobiography allows Gattinara to dwell at length on his personal engagement in diplomacy for the emperor, as it allows for other 'personal' insights which will be discussed below. Other aspects of institutional competence cited by Gattinara include his ability to mobilise financial resources for the emperor<sup>32</sup> and the ability to maintain regular control of administration by creating instructions.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, administrative competence is completely overshadowed in the autobiography by Gattinara's competence as a diplomat.

There are several striking differences between Gattinara's model of political competence and that constructed in Burgundian historiography before and about 1500. The role of faith and personal piety in the construction of the image of a successful political actor is the most important of those. Gattinara does not merely portray himself as a shrewd and constant servant of his lord: in the autobiography, his political decisions are often informed by piety and spiritual introspection. He finds it necessary to tell his potential reader that while engaged in personal litigation over an estate he first gained and then lost in the Franche Comté, he gave religious oaths (e.g. not to eat meat and fish; to travel to the Holy Sepulchre).<sup>34</sup> The use of religious devotions according to Gattinara is sharply different from that according to La Marche, who refers to devotional practices either in the context of moral examples (e.g. a king becoming a monk) or in the contexts of chivalry and crusade (a statue of Our Lady previously used in a tournament but later dedicated to a monastery; a series of religious oaths

<sup>30</sup> Gattinara (in Kodek, see n. 24), pp. 192–3.

<sup>31</sup> As in the passage quoted above, but also throughout the memoirs.

<sup>32</sup> Gattinara (in Kodek, see n. 24), p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

at the Banquet of the Pheasant).<sup>35</sup> For La Marche, the use of devotions is not to achieve an inner enlightenment that would make practical political choices more feasible—the devotions are simply there as manifestations of fealty to Christ as one's spiritual suzerain or to Our Lady. The fact that one is a good Christian does not guarantee better political chances—indeed, God can take a virtuous prince (Charles the Bold remained, for La Marche, an example in this category), and cause his fall in order to inspire humility in other Christians. For Gattinara, personal religious practices are *the* way to achieve a better outlook in practical matters. In critical situations, when important decisions are to be taken, he goes on a retreat to a monastery.

There is a new kind of consistency in the way the chancellor attributes political misfortunes to divine will. While La Marche, Commynes and their contemporaries and predecessors in the chivalric culture were at times unclear as to what determined the outcomes of political enterprises—Providence, Fortuna or personal traits of the people involved, there is no such confusion of causes in Gattinara. Political complications for him are defined through the workings of Providence, and the ruler, standing closer to God than ordinary people, can only hold fast to his faith and rely on divine assistance when all seems lost.<sup>36</sup> If the losses came through his own oversight (as in the case when Charles V let his armies loose on Italy), he is to be first criticised, but then reminded of his closeness to God and the need not to lose hope. The consequences of incompetence may seem at one point to be blamed on the prince: 'Since the emperor did not prevent and did not punish the shameful deeds of his soldiers and servants, did not let justice take its course, did not pay what was owed, did not take care of those who bore losses... he was now viewed as unjust instead of just, as wicked instead of good...'.<sup>37</sup> However, immediately afterwards the blame is shifted from the prince to his servants, and the prince is admonished to put trust in God to set things right. The antidote against princely incompetence is princely piety.

If for Molinet, c. 1477, the way to accommodate the cruelty of war perpetrated by his lord was to insert that war into the standard reference frame of the preservation of the *bien publique* (defined as peace, justice and prosperity), for Gattinara, c. 1527, the way to justify the excesses of

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<sup>35</sup> This and similar examples are discussed at length in Catherine Emerson, *Olivier de La Marche and The Rhetoric of Fifteenth-Century Historiography* (see Ch. I, n. 16).

<sup>36</sup> Gattinara (in Kodek, see n. 24), *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

war is through his own and his prince's recourse to faith and piety. This goes to show that the political ideal of the dynasty at the time of Gattinara differs fundamentally from that fifty years earlier. It has been pointed out many times that Reformation changed the nature of the state.<sup>38</sup> In the writings of Gattinara, his perception of the new religious controversy in Germany changed the normative nature of political competence ascribed to the ruler and his officers.

The new model of political competence presented by Gattinara took root rather quickly, not least in the political ideas of his employer. Bidding goodbye to the deputies of the Estates General at Brussels on 25 October 1555, after an eventful and fairly unsuccessful reign, Emperor Charles V exhibited in his speech the traits of a similar approach to politics. At the first sight, the speech seems to follow the precepts of the Burgundian political ideology. Charles begins with a conventional formula: he had wished, he says, to work for the good of Germany and his other realms, including the Belgian provinces, and he had hoped to uphold peace among Christian nations and to unite their forces in order to protect the Catholic faith from the Ottomans.<sup>39</sup> His striving had been for peace: '... I never started wars willingly, and as I part from you, nothing is more painful for me than that I was not able to achieve for you a stable and secure peace.' Like Charles the Bold in Molinet's chronicle, he had exposed his body to dangers and to tiresome travels for the good of his subjects. While feeling physically weak, 'I felt it my duty to sacrifice for the wellbeing of my people the remaining strength that was left in me.'<sup>40</sup> However, as he implores his Netherlandish subjects to be loyal to their new lord (his son and successor Philip II of Spain), it is not against foreign princes or troublesome urban rebels that his primary warnings are directed: 'Above all, guard yourself from those new sects, by which neighbouring lands are plagued, and should heresy enter also the bounds of your land, do not hesitate to extinguish it, or it will go ill for you'.<sup>41</sup> It is, thus, not their industry or loyalty to the prince that henceforth constitutes the subjects' political competence, but their adherence to the right creed and their intolerance of heresy.

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<sup>38</sup> Heinz Schilling, 'The Reformation and the Rise of the Early Modern State', in James D. Tracy (ed.), *Luther and the Modern State in Germany, Sixteenth-Century Essays and Studies*, 7 (1986), pp. 21–30.

<sup>39</sup> In Alfred Kohler (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte Karls V* (see Ch. II, n. 27), p. 466.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 467.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

*Vernulaeus and the Triumph of Confessional Competence*

The essence of the change that occurred in the dynastic ideology of the Habsburgs (and of other European monarchies) during the sixteenth century and culminated in the first half of the seventeenth century, was the nominal, ideologically grounded, demand for rejection of compromise. One does not negotiate with those who endanger the spiritual welfare of one's subjects, let alone strikes a compromise with heretics. Robert Bireley successfully summarised the essence of this ideology, leading to the concept of the Thirty Years' War as 'holy war',<sup>42</sup> and certainly many of its participants viewed it from that perspective. Some recent studies have shown that in reality, the monarchs themselves were, perhaps, not among the participants who shared that fundamentalist view.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, some of their advisers did,<sup>44</sup> and so did the authors of widely publicised works that presented their ideology to the audiences at home and abroad.

In the field of official historiography, no other author better exemplifies the rejection of compromise and the emphasis on the central role of Catholic piety in the running of political affairs than the Louvain professor and imperial and royal historiographer Nicolaus Vernulaeus (Nicolas Vernulz).<sup>45</sup> To be sure, history writing, for Vernulaeus, is not the same thing as for the earlier Flemish apologists of the dynasty who worked for Maximilian I and his heirs. He is a classicist and a neo-Latin scholar. He is also more of an apologist than a historian, even though the distinction between the two is becoming somewhat thin among the pro-Habsburg

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<sup>42</sup> E.g. in Robert Bireley, 'Confessional Absolutism in the Habsburg Lands in the Seventeenth Century', in: Charles W. Ingrao (ed.), *State and Society in Early Modern Austria* (West Lafayette, 1994), pp. 36–53. See also Robert Bireley, *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation: Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini, S. J., and the Formation of Imperial Policy* (Chapel Hill, 1981).

<sup>43</sup> Christoph Kampmann, 'Peace impossible? The Holy Roman Empire and the European State system in the 17th century', in: Olaf Asbach and Peter Schroder (eds.), *War, the State and International Law in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (London, 2010), pp. 197–211.

<sup>44</sup> Ferdinand II, in particular, had such an influential adviser in the person of Lamormaini. See Robert Bireley, *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation* (see n. 42).

<sup>45</sup> Nicolaus Vernulaeus (Vernulz, 1583–1649), was a university professor at Leuven. He began as a teacher of rhetorics and eloquence at university colleges in the Southern Netherlands and later was appointed Professor of History and Politics at the Collegium Trilingue in Leuven. Veronika Oberparleiter, 'Nicolaus Vernulaeus's Representation of the House of Habsburg'. Conference paper, from the conference *The Mistress-Court of Mighty Europe*, University of Bangor, 2006.

writers during the period in question.<sup>46</sup> The question whether history as written by Vernulaeus is, in fact, history, has been last raised very recently.<sup>47</sup>

Vernulaeus is generally regarded to be a follower of the Neostoic doctrine of Justus Lipsius.<sup>48</sup> That is probably true; however, the importance of Neostoical influences on Vernulaeus and other intellectuals serving the Austrian Habsburgs in the seventeenth century should not be overrated to the extent of excluding other influences. The military doctrine of the Habsburgs during the period was arguably still influenced by the scholasticism of Bellarmine, for whom peace and restoration of the public order were the only legitimate goals for which a virtuous prince can enter war.<sup>49</sup> Support for these ideas was found also in the works of more contemporary writers, such as Saavedra Fajardo.<sup>50</sup> Yet leanings towards a peaceful doctrine need not necessarily denote a readiness for ideological compromise. One can interpret these leanings in the wider context of emphasis on the preservation of the status quo, the 'old peaceful order of things' (*alte Ruhestand*) of which political documents issued by imperial authorities during the Thirty Years' War sometimes speak.<sup>51</sup> This status quo, for many pro-Habsburg authors, involved a distinctly Catholic version of politics that had to be spread to the whole of Germany.<sup>52</sup>

One has to be careful not to take the works of Vernulaeus for mere erudite exercises in neo-Latin rhetoric inspired by Stoic philosophy. Their essence was largely polemical. Vernulaeus' *Apologia pro Augustissima*

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<sup>46</sup> The border between history and apology is vague among the Catholic pro-Habsburg authors of the period. Thus, Didacus Lequille [Diego Tafuri], *De rebus Austriacis tomus tribus: Piissima atque augustissima Domus Austria* (Innsbruck, 1660) can hardly be called a historian, but his apology of the Habsburgs comes remarkably close to Vernulaeus at some points.

<sup>47</sup> In a lecture by Veronika Oberparleiter, 'Nicolas Vernulaeus' *Historia Austriaca*—A Historiographical Writing?' (Catholic University of Louvain, 24/02/2005).

<sup>48</sup> See Veronika Oberparleiter, 'Nicolaus Vernulaeus' Darstellung der Habsburger: *Apologia, Virtutes und Historia Austriaca*, mit einem Exkurs über die Methodus legendi historiarum' in *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 56 (2008).

<sup>49</sup> Robert Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince: anti-Machiavellianism or Catholic Statecraft in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1990), p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Maria Goloubeva, *The Glorification of Emperor Leopold I in Image, Spectacle and Text* (Mainz, 2000), p. 89.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Apart from Vernulaeus, two examples of this attitude are the propagandistic histories of the Thirty Years War by Lothicus and Wassenberg: Johann Peter Lotichius, *Austrias Parva: id est, gloriae Austriacae, et belli nuper Germanici, sub divo Matthia, Ferdinandis II. et III. Imp. gesti, compendaria* (Frankfurt, 1653), and Eberhard Wassenberg, *Panegyricus Sacratissimo Imperatori Ferdinando III.* (Cologne, 1647).

*Gente Austriaca* vindicated not only Habsburg piety but also clemency and other dynastic virtues in the face of the accusations of bigotry, intolerance and cruelty.<sup>53</sup> Among other things, in *Apologia* Vernulaeus justified the policy of Philip II of Spain towards the Dutch rebels. Elsewhere, Vernulaeus often devoted explicit praises to the suppression of heretics—he specifically approved of the suppression of the rebellious and heretical Bohemian nobles in his *Laudatio funebris* for Ferdinand II.<sup>54</sup>

Other works by this Flemish historiographer of the Habsburgs are less polemic in character. *Historia Austriaca* is a short and dry Latin chronicle, without many rhetorical embellishments. It demonstrates, however, that Vernulaeus was perhaps a greater proponent of direct divine interference in human affairs than even Gattinara had been. Thus, after the rebellious citizens of Bruges had held Maximilian captive for nine months, executing several of his courtiers, a change in natural topography of their land warrants divine punishment. The sea retreats, leaving Bruges dry and desolate far from the shore, thus cutting away its profitable sea trade and awarding the maritime primacy to Antwerp: '*quo tempore cum refugiente mari, celebrem portum suum Brugenses amiserint, emporio Antverpium translato, quidam divinam vindictam sunt suspicati*'.<sup>55</sup> *Historia* also shares the emphasis on theological virtues with other works of Vernulaeus. Thus, Maximilian is praised as a learned, just and perfect ruler,<sup>56</sup> his characterisation ending with the words '*Catolicae Religionis amantissimus*'. Also in the characterisation of Charles V, piety occupies the most visible place in the description of the ruler's virtues.<sup>57</sup>

The impact of Vernulaeus on the perception of the dynasty in the Habsburg Hereditary Lands may have been considerable. A compilation of his praises for the House of Austria, as expressed in the *Apologia* and in *Virtutum Augustissimae Gentis Austriacae libri tres*,<sup>58</sup> was published in 1665 as *Phosphorus Austriacus*, a book that became widespread in the Austrian lands. Recent studies by Veronica Oberparleiter demonstrate that this work had a lasting influence in Austria that stretches well beyond the

<sup>53</sup> Nicolaus Vernulaeus, *Apologia pro Augustissima Gente Austriaca* (Louvain, 1640).

<sup>54</sup> Veronika Pokorny, 'Clementia Austriaca, Studien zur Bedeutung der clementia principis für die Habsburger im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert', *MIÖG*, 86 (1978), pp. 320–3.

<sup>55</sup> Nicolaus Vernulaeus, *Historia Austriaca* (Louvain, 1651), pp. 59–60.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–3.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. his special respect for priests is pointed out on p. 65.

<sup>58</sup> Nicolaus Vernulaeus, *Virtutum Augustissimae Gentis Austriacae libri tres* (Louvain, 1640).

period of ultimate confessional tensions of the Thirty Years' War.<sup>59</sup> It is perhaps fitting to finish this chapter by examining the model of political competence derived from the works of Vernulaeus and presented for popular consumption in *Phosphorus Austriacus*.

One of the fragments of Vernulaeus's writings that the *Phosphorus* reproduces (in Chapter IV) treats the topic of *metodus legendi Historias & in iis proficiendi*.<sup>60</sup> In this essay, after quoting Cicero and Thucydides on the usefulness of history for understanding the functioning of commonwealths, Vernulaeus dwells on the traditional taxonomy of the functions of history as a source of counsels which are salutary for the republic, as a repository of the virtues of princes and judges, and as a collection of examples to inspire generous souls.

What kind of examples, then, are drawn by Vernulaeus and his followers from the history of the dynasty? One can glean some understanding of that from the table of contents of his work. Here is, for instance, a fragment from the list of chapters in which, after tracing the dynasty's origins, its main virtues are summarised:

- Chapter XLVII: *Causa peripituitatis stemmatis Austriaci est pietas, & concordia in orthodoxa religione*
- Chapter XLVIII: *Supremi principes Vasalli sunt incarnati Regis Christi. Quanta inde fidelitatis obligatio in principibus erga Regnum Domini sui*
- Chapter XLIX: *Quis sit ordo naturalis inter regna & Ecclesiam, & utrorumque defensionem*
- Chapter L: *regibus pietas maxime necessaria, ex qua sola discunt officium suum*
- Chapter LI: *Regnorum ortus, occasus, incrementa, decrementa, a remunerante vel puniente Deo*

The choice of sources from which Vernulaeus draws his understanding of princely virtues differs not only from that of Hugonet and Charles the Bold, but also from that of Erasmus. The late medieval and classical authorities on statecraft that Flemish and Burgundian officials once had favoured are rejected in favour of more orthodox medieval mirrors of the princes: Chapter LII reproduces some of the maxims that the tradition traces to the advice given by St. Louis to his son.

<sup>59</sup> Veronika Oberparleiter, 'Nicolaus Vernulaeus's Representation of the House of Habsburg'. Conference paper for the conference *The Mistress-Court of Mighty Europe*, University of Bangor, 2006.

<sup>60</sup> On this, also Veronika Oberparleiter, 'Nicolaus Vernulaeus' Darstellung der Habsburger' (see n. 48).



Part III of *Phosphorus* is dedicated more specifically to the virtues and heroic deeds of the dynasty, each chapter subdivided into examples from the lives of various emperors. It begins with Chapter II: 'Zeal of the faith and Catholic religion', and is followed by:

- III: Piety and trust in God
- IV: Cult of the Eucharist
- V: Devotion to the Cross of Christ
- VI: Reverence of Austrian princes towards the men of the Church
- VII: Piety towards parents, brothers, preceptors
- VIII: Justice
- IX: Clemency
- Etc.

It becomes obvious from this hierarchy of virtues that Christian virtues and their derivatives (including profound respect for the Church and the tenets of the Catholic religion) are viewed by Vernulaeus and his Austrian followers as central for successful rulers and are placed above the cardinal virtues (including justice) that the secular tradition of civic humanism, once shared by the dynasty's Burgundian predecessors, had favoured.

What, then, of the crucial elements of political competence that have lead to the success and pre-eminence of the Habsburgs on the European stage? The source of the dynasty's prosperity, according to Vernulaeus, is neither military, nor institutional. The Habsburgs are great rulers and their dynasty prospers because they keep the (divine) laws and adhere without fault to the divine cult; they honour the Sacraments of the Catholic religion.<sup>61</sup> The dynastic byword that the Habsburgs acquired their lands not by arms, but by marriages and by just succession is repeated over and over.<sup>62</sup>

The ideal prince according to *Phosphorus* is Ferdinand II, and his particularly righteous deeds are connected to the moments when he rejects compromise that might be harmful to the Church. A good example is the way in which Ferdinand, according to *Phosphorus*, reacts to the news that Wallenstein may be negotiating a peace with the 'sectarians' behind his back: '*Cum Walstenius Fritlandiae dux, cum sectariis in Silesia de pace non bona fide, ut rumor increbuerat, ageret, procumbens in genua Caesar; Si ea pax perniciosa, inquit, Ecclesiae futura est, tu Deus, tu Dei mater, illam*

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<sup>61</sup> Nicolaus Vernulaeus, *Phosphori Austriaci de Gente Austriaca libri tres* (Louvain 1665), pp. 147–8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 230.



*impedite*.<sup>63</sup> Peace, when dangerous to the Church's position, is of no value at all, and is to be rejected.<sup>64</sup> Concern for the security of subjects and the need to restore mundane activities such as commerce that sometimes came to the surface in the texts of official historians dealing with war before and around 1500, are of no significance in the texts of Vernulaeus or indeed in other pro-Habsburg histories of the time of the Thirty Years' War.<sup>65</sup> In a similar way, the handbook to government probably written for the future Ferdinand III, *Princeps in Compendio*, begins with a reference to divine appointment as the cause of princely government and continues to argue that the primary obligation of the prince is towards religion (and only afterwards to the public good).<sup>66</sup> Incessant recourse to God is the way for a prince to ensure the right conduct of his affairs.<sup>67</sup> It is not surprising that proceeding from this, the primary task of a prince is the promotion of divine cult: '*Bonus princeps animum suum semper et primario ad Dei cultum et honorem ante omnia promovendum intendet*.' For those who might understand this sentence in a generic, abstract or excessively spiritual way, the next sentence specifies what divine cult means in the given context: '*...curabit, ut religionem Catholicam... conservet et... promoveat ac nullas haereses illabi patiatur*'.<sup>68</sup> At least at the normative level, preservation of the Catholic religion has become the new preservation of the public good. The confessional model of political competence has reached its peak, and piety is a substitute for prosperity.

To summarise, in the era of Counter-Reformation, the religious model of princely competence was superimposed upon the late medieval/Renaissance model of secular political competence and, in the case of the Habsburgs, almost entirely eclipsed it.<sup>69</sup> This trend is at its peak during the reign of Ferdinand II, and is reflected in the works of his Flemish

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>64</sup> On the striving for peace and the rejection of 'dishonourable' peace in the Habsburg policies during the Thirty Years' War, see Kampmann, 'Peace impossible?' (see n. 43).

<sup>65</sup> E.g. Johann Peter Lotichius, *Austrias Parva* (see n. 52) treats the motivation of the emperor in the Thirty Years' War from a confessional perspective and offers a special explanation of the Habsburgs' actions whenever it seems that their absolute adherence to the Catholic cause may be compromised (e.g. when they combat Catholic France).

<sup>66</sup> *Princeps in compendio*, ed. by Franz Bosbach in Konrad Repgen (ed.), *Das Herrscherbild im 17. Jahrhundert* (Münster, 1991), pp. 89–90.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> A certain exception can be found in the works of a slightly later official historiographer Khevenhüller, whose voluminous history of the reign of Ferdinand II is an example of the genre of pragmatic history consisting almost entirely of the description of military actions and diplomatic treaties. (On Khevenhüller, see below, Chapter IV).

apologist Nicolaus Vernulaeus and in the Habsburg handbook on good governance, *Princeps in Compendio*. The model of political competence proposed by the apologists of Ferdinand II, using ample historical examples, is that of subservience of the political field to the religious field in the direct (institutional) sense. Within this framework, the main virtue of a political leader is in serving the Church and upholding its doctrine in the commonwealth, not in upholding and protecting the commonwealth as such.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE REVIVAL OF CIVIC HUMANISM, *RAISON D'ÉTAT* AND THE INCOMPETENCE OF SUBJECTS IN THE HISTORIES OF GALEAZZO GUALDO PRIORATO

#### *The End of the Thirty Years' War and the Limitations of Confessional Rhetoric*

Recent studies show that especially during the second half of the Thirty Years' War, all of the states involved in it, including the Habsburgs, were looking for ways to reach some kind of agreement with their political and confessional opponents, but their concept of 'honourable peace'—peace on terms that would be compatible with political and dynastic honour—prevented them from reaching that agreement.<sup>1</sup> This important evidence suggests that there was, indeed, a certain distance between the more ideological manifestations of confessional propaganda, such as the works of Vernulaeus and Lamormaini, and the position taken up by monarchs and their diplomats in actual politics. It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that in the midst of the war, when the Habsburg diplomat Franz Christoph von Khevenhüller,<sup>2</sup> a Carinthian nobleman who had converted to Catholicism early in his career, was commissioned to write a history of the reign of Ferdinand II, the desired outcome was to be a sober pragmatic history, with an emphasis on legality, based on the documents available from the imperial Chancellery.<sup>3</sup>

Khevenhüller's *Annales Ferdinandeï* were not published until the eighteenth century, but as a major work of officially sanctioned Habsburg historiography they deserve a mention here. What Khevenhüller produced (but never finished) was an example of 'pragmatic history', such as it was

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Kampmann, 'Peace impossible? The Holy Roman Empire and the European State system in the 17th century' (see Ch. III, n. 43).

<sup>2</sup> On Khevenhüller, see the biographical note published by the University of Graz: <http://www-gewi.uni-graz.at/cocoon/barch/get?pid=wissg-b-072-141> (last viewed on 02.01.2009.)

<sup>3</sup> Frantz Christoph Khevenhiller (sic), *ANNALES | FERDINANDEI | Oder | Wahrhafft | Beschreibung, | Kaeyzers FERDINANDI | Des Andern, | Mildesten Gedächtniß, Geburt, Aufziehung und bißhero in Krieg und | Friedens-Zeiten vollbrachten Thaten, gefuehrten Kriegen, und vollzogenen hochwichti- | gen Geschaefften*, 12 vols. (Leipzig, 1716–26).

in the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup> Historical events, fairly recent and imbued with much ideological meaning by different parties in the confessional conflict, were grounded in official documents (reproduced in whole). This approach both transmitted and muted the ideological message, by allowing the reader to glean some of the opponents' position. This did not annihilate the ideological message completely: Khevenhüller's history was supposed to conform to the official ideological standpoint of the dynasty, and even the long titles of some of the volumes emphasise God's assistance to Ferdinand II in his ordeals.<sup>5</sup> Yet a confessional model of political competence in the spirit of Vernulaeus cannot be gleaned from the pages of *Annales Ferdinandeï*. On the whole, Khevenhüller is too much of a diplomat to express judgements of competence or incompetence of the high political actors whose resolutions, declarations and manifestos he documents for posterity. Nevertheless, indirectly Khevenhüller's work signals a step towards a new approach in Habsburg historiography: by creating a more 'grounded' and legalist narrative, the confessional propagandistic message is made less immediate. The paradox of Khevenhüller's achievement as official historiographer is in the fact that he took dynastic history to a different level: the genre of legalist 'pragmatic history' dulled the sharpness of confessional polemic but allowed more space for an analytical reading of sources (which were provided) and depicted the political and confessional strife in Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century in terms of competing legal claims, negotiations and deliberations, rather than as a series of divinely pre-determined conflicts of right and wrong religion. In the second half of the century, this tendency was to be taken further by Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, court historian to Emperor Leopold I.

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<sup>4</sup> On pragmatic history, see Hilmar Kallweit, 'Zur Charakterisierung der pragmatischen Geschichtsschreibung', in: Horst Walter Blanke, Jorn Rusen (eds.), *Von der Aufklärung zum Historismus. Zum Strukturwandel historischen Denkens* (Paderborn, 1984), pp. 155–7.

<sup>5</sup> Franz Christoph von Khevenhüller, *Neunter Theil, | Darinnen Koenigs und Kaeyzers Ferdinands | des Andern dieses Namens, Ungarisch- und Roemische | Croenung: Die Antretung seiner schweren Regierung, seine Ver- | folgung und Gefahr von denen Boeheimischen Rebellen, Ungarischen, Bethlahemi- | schen und etlichen Oesterreichischen, auch Reichs-Staenden, wie ihm GOtt absonderlich geholf- | fen.* (Volume 9 of *Annales Ferdinandeï*).

*Priorato: Religious Strife As a Conflict of Political Interests*

Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato was famous in his day primarily for his writings, which covered a vast terrain and were by no means limited to history.<sup>6</sup> One of the reasons behind modern historians' disregard for his work is the almost universal focus on histories written in the 'national' language of a respective country, which persists to this day despite the increasing internationalisation of the academic field. Excellent studies produced in the second half of the twentieth century have suffered from this nation-based perspective. Thus, Orest Ranum's *Artisans of Glory*,<sup>7</sup> despite its in-depth analysis of historical thought and the social and political position of historians in early modern France, makes no reference to Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, who wrote French history under the patronage of Mazarin, but did so in Italian. As long as the national perspective persists, the work of Gualdo Priorato is bound to fall outside the scope of most researchers' interest, since his histories were inevitably in Italian, but the subject matter depended entirely on the patron of the day. It is ironic that in the mid-20th century Anna Coreth viewed him predominantly as an 'Austrian' historian.<sup>8</sup>

Priorato's contribution to the official history of the Habsburgs in the middle of the seventeenth century consists in resuscitating the connection between dynastic historiography and the traditions of Italian civic humanism (previously eclipsed by the Christian humanism of Erasmus and Gattinara) and in returning dynastic history to a vision of politics in

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<sup>6</sup> An extensive biographical note on Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato is available in Giuliana Tosso Rodinis, *Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, un moralista Veneto alla Corte di Luigi XIV* (Florence, 1968). Active in military campaigns since the 1620s (including the siege of La Rochelle, 1629), and as historian since the 1640s (Tosso Rodinis, pp. 22–24), Priorato took part in the wars of Venice against the Ottoman Porte. After having served Mazarin, Priorato passed, in 1657, into the service of Christina of Sweden. He maintained his French connections for a long time before becoming completely attached to the court of Vienna as official court historian in the later 1660s. He also published several editions of the history of Mazarin's government, a history of Queen Christina, a history of France and many other works. Apart from his histories, Gualdo Priorato wrote a number of works on military art and fortifications and produced some of the best-known geographical descriptions of towns and fortifications in Europe of his day. See e.g. Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Il Teatro del Belgio* (Vienna, 1673).

<sup>7</sup> Orest Ranum, *Artisans of Glory. Writers and Historical thought in seventeenth-century France* (Chapel Hill, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> 'Gualdo Priorato, der sich durch mehrere Arbeiten aus österreichischen Geschichte bekannt gemacht hatte'. Anna Coreth, *Österreichische Geschichtsschreibung in der Barockzeit (1620–1740)* (Vienna, 1950), p. 72.

which secular constellations of interests play a greater role than considerations of spiritual salvation—at least as far as the explanation of motives of political actors is concerned.

Priorato was first commissioned by Empress Eleonora to write the history of her deceased husband, Ferdinand III. Around the same time, in the early 1670s, he wrote a history of the early years of the reign of Leopold I, also commissioned by the court of Vienna. In both books, a decisive break with confessional models of political competence that had previously dominated dynastic historiography is in evidence.

Writing several decades after the end of the Thirty Years' War, Priorato uses the benefit of hindsight to avoid the pitfalls of fiercely partisan and confessional history in the mode of Lothicus.<sup>9</sup> In *Historia di Ferdinando Terzo Imperatore*,<sup>10</sup> the pattern of the political world is made up of private and public interests in which considerations of religion appear secondary. Thus, the narration of the life of Ferdinand III begins with the words:

The Austrian emperors sustained great wars almost constantly. The mightier they became, with their hereditary realms and vast provinces, the more it awoke the envy and fear in other potentates of Europe. Among the greater part of those there sprang intrigues which are prone to be born of the jealousy of state and of emulation, which (intrigues) easily turned step by step into open and irreconcilable wars.<sup>11</sup>

Working within the official discourse of the Habsburg court in Vienna, Priorato is far from condemning the religious policies of his patrons and their predecessors, but he is always ready to justify a policy of compromise which for the likes of Gattinara and Vernulaeus was barely short of apostasy.<sup>12</sup> In the beginning of his *Historia di Ferdinando*, Priorato looks back on the interactions of the previous Habsburgs with the Protestants and sees, for the most part, a long story of ambitions, interests and 'jealousies'. The discourse of Priorato's work contrasts sharply with the confessional rhetoric of Vernulaeus and other Habsburg apologists during

<sup>9</sup> See above, Chapter III, Footnote 65.

<sup>10</sup> Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Historia di Ferdinando Terzo Imperatore* (Vienna, 1672).

<sup>11</sup> 'Sostennero gl' Imperatori Austriaci quasi continuamente grandissime guerre. Quanto più per gli Hereditati Regni, & amplissime Provincie divennero Prepotenti, tanto più risvegliarono l'invidia, e l'timore negl' altri Potentati di Europa. Dalla maggior parte di questi s' ordirono quelle machine solite esser mosse dalle gelosie di Stato, e dall' emulatione, che facilmente si convertono poco a poco in aperte, & irreconciliabili guerre'. Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Charles V was, according to Priorato, 'constrained' to concede the freedom of consciousness to the Protestants because too many German princes had already embraced Luther's doctrine. Priorato, *Historia di Ferdinando* (see n. 10), 'Sommario', n.p.

the Thirty Years' War. Where Vernulaeus and his followers could easily describe a compromise as 'pernicious to the faith' (as when outlining the concerns of Ferdinand II about the peace that Wallenstein had supposedly intended to conclude), Priorato preferred the wording 'gravely detrimental to the interests of the Catholics' (as when speaking of the privileges accorded by Rudolph II to the Protestants).<sup>13</sup>

In *Historia di Ferdinando Terzo* the relative weakness of the Catholic cause during the Reformation is not a punishment from God, but a result of human passions and mistakes. In Priorato's narrative of the origins of religious strife in Germany, Charles V concedes religious liberties to the Protestants in the peace of Augsburg because his efforts are needed elsewhere—he has to defend hereditary domains from the Turk. Priorato does not necessarily approve of his action: 'This departure was not sufficient to save Hungary, but was enough to infest Germany with the new dogmas preached by Martin Luther',<sup>14</sup> however, how could the emperor be blamed if others behaved as they did? Priorato is not shy to blame ecclesiastic princes and prelates who, instead of guarding their flock, had neglected their duties and accumulated wealth and luxury 'in such a manner, that in relation to priests, public scorn succeeded in place of reverence; in the place of love, hatred, and [there was] more crude abhorrence [towards them] than filial affection.'<sup>15</sup> Secular princes, too, neglected their moral duty: "... Those who had previously sought with great piety to extinguish in human hearts the cupidity of earthly ambition, began on the contrary to foment it in their own hearts. . . . [T]hose [ecclesiastic] princes, lured by the shine of gold, claimed to protect every unjust cause, from which they could derive profit." This, in turn, had led some secular princes to spurn the doctrine of St Peter and the authority of the Church that they sought to weaken.<sup>16</sup> What follows, is a description of a century-long struggle of various interests leading in the end to the Thirty Years' War in which the dynasty and its allies are shown as for the most part triumphant: rebellion is always followed by retribution, the suppression of the rebels in Austria by Duke Maximilian of Bavaria is called 'valorous', and the emperor's ban on the Elector Palatine and his adherents, as well as the executions of Bohemian rebels, are presented in a positive light. It would seem, however, that it is not so much the restoration of Catholic

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Priorato, *Historia di Ferdinando* (see n. 10), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

religion to the Hereditary Lands, but merely the restoration of strong monarchical power that Priorato applauds.

This impression is confirmed by Priorato's musings on the vicissitudes of German history in the very beginning of *Historia di Ferdinando Terzo*. There, he states that 'the German Empire used to be flourishing and powerful owing to its majesty, richness, discipline, piety and good government, so that it attracted the glances of all the parts of the world.' However, later, unwelcome change was brought by the inconsiderate actions of secular and ecclesiastical authorities alike:

Later, vicissitudes caused to decline the ancient vigour of virtue with which it [the Empire] had been founded, and it reduced itself to such circumstances that its majesty was almost lost, its riches dispersed, its discipline corrupted, its good policy subverted, its *virtù* reviled or destroyed, by [private] interest, by ambition, and by the ignorance of private individuals who indulged voraciously in cupidity and pursued their own interests, and thus was ruined the good reputation which is the splendour and the glory of principalities.<sup>17</sup>

The passage leaves no place for doubt as to the connection between Priorato's worldview and the traditions of Italian civic humanism. The notion of private ambition as corruption of *virtù* had been part of the rhetoric of Machiavelli, drawing attention to the limitations of human nature (except in some individuals) that make people wish to manipulate with political institutions for their own private gain, thus undermining the greatness of the republic.<sup>18</sup> It is, thus, the greatness of principalities (seen much from the same perspective from which Machiavelli had once viewed the greatness of republics) that concerns Priorato much more than the religious soundness of their government.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Mancato poi con la vicissitudine delle cose in esso quell' antico vigore di Virtù col quale fù fondato, à termine tale si ridussi, che perduta quasi la Maestà, disperse le ricchezze, corrotta la disciplina, controvertita la Politica, avvilita (or annilita) la Virtù, per l'interesse, per l' ambitione, e per l'ignoranza de particolari, che datisi in preda alla cupidigia de commodi, & interessi privati, e sbandita quella riputatione, ch' è lo splendore, e Gloria de Principati...' Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 2002), ii, p. 164.



*Competent Historian for Competent Politicians:  
Priorato's Model of Political Competence*

While working as a historian on commissions from different monarchs and governments, Priorato insisted to the last that it was as a nobleman and soldier, and not as a historian that he committed to paper the notable deeds of his contemporaries. Priorato constructs his own competence as history writer through emphasising personal experience of politics. His carefully circumscribed self-image is that of a man of the world, with first-hand knowledge of the arts of war and diplomacy. Not only has he been personally 'to theatres of action and almost all courts' described in his account, he takes care to remind the reader that this kind of expertise is essential for achieving a valid account of history. His message, formulated in several publications, not least in the introductions to *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare* and to its sequel, *Continuatione*, published in 1676, postulates that those who do not know the art of war cannot describe war, and those who have little idea of interests of the state (called 'reason of state' in the introduction to *Continuatione*) should better keep silence concerning political events, since they cannot understand 'causes and councils'. Indeed, according to Priorato,

It is not to be wondered if those who have never left their country and never travelled anywhere but in squares among crowds of ignorant people, and among the fantasies and lies of the gazettes, have caused nausea by publishing histories of our time without truth, without clarity, without sound judgement...with turbid and confused narratives, with manifest contradictions...which renders them worthy of punishment for defrauding merit...and assigning glory to those who have not had any part in the deeds...<sup>19</sup>

The 'low and vulgar' sources of information concerning political events are thus indicated and discredited. For Priorato these, notably, include the main printed media of the time providing updated information on current state of political affairs—the gazettes. Doubts concerning the reliability of news accounts in contemporary media were, of course, commonplace in Europe in the seventeenth century, but ironically, also court historians like Priorato were among the usual suspects credited with producing

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<sup>19</sup> Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare*, 3 vols. (Vienna, 1670–74), I, 'A chi legge', n.p.

unreliable narratives.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps in order to pre-empt such critiques, Priorato contrasts the 'low and vulgar' sources with what he sees as reliable sources—the texts of official treaties and relations, inserted at the end of his book with the purpose of not interrupting his narrative (to avoid the trap of becoming unreadable, into which Khevenhüller's *Annales* fall pitifully), but reinforcing its authenticity. The author of numerous histories also stresses occasionally that he, in fact, does not consider himself a professional historian. As pointed out in the introduction to the third volume of *Historia*,

Truly my profession is not that of historian, however noble, useful and pleasant to those who love the memory of things past it is, since I have not applied myself to studies, but more to arms, as in thirty years that I have spent taking part in wars in various parts, and also at the courts of almost all kings and princes of Europe, of which I have also published relations, thus having learned from practice of military fortunes, and of political government, which is exceedingly useful and if I may say so necessary for relating histories, to which I have been incited by natural leanings (*un genio naturale*) for my own pleasure and diversion, [and] have applied myself to writing in my natural manner of a nobleman and soldier, without niceties, and without artificial ornaments.<sup>21</sup>

It would be perhaps a mistake to take the reluctance of the author of about thirty books and relations published before 1670 to call himself a historian for a sign of modesty. As late as 1676, in the introduction to *Continuatione*, Priorato feels obliged to defend himself from hypothetical detractors who would doubt that writing history is a worthy occupation for a nobleman, by reminding that Julius Cesar, too, wrote history. Moreover, as one can see from the quotation above, for Priorato the first-hand knowledge of events, including military operations, is the primary qualification for history-writing. Military and political competence happened to be the things of which he considered himself an expert. Of all Priorato's works, two—*Il Guerriero prudente, e politico*<sup>22</sup> and *Vite, et azioni di personaggi militari, e politici*<sup>23</sup>—seem to provide the best summary of his own assessment of what it takes to be competent in affairs of state and war.

<sup>20</sup> On the critique of contemporary histories as a source of political information during the seventeenth century, see Brendan Dooley, 'News and doubt in early modern culture', in: B. Dooley and S. Baron (eds.) *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (New York and London, 2001), pp. 278–9.

<sup>21</sup> Priorato, *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare* (see n. 19), III, 'A chi legge', n.p.

<sup>22</sup> Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Il Guerriero prudente, e politico* (Venice, 1640).

<sup>23</sup> First published Augsburg, 1658?

The first, published in Venice in 1640 and dedicated to Louis XIII, probably in view of Priorato's aspirations in the service of France, speaks of the art of war with a heavy emphasis on pragmatic and measured, 'political' behaviour, which allowed Giuliana Tosso Rodinis to label Priorato as a moralist and to place him in the tradition of Machiavelli and Guicciardini.<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on 'political' behaviour was common for the period, but it has to be emphasised that Priorato was not a mere imitator of Gracián, whose *El político Don Fernando el Católico* was first published in the same year as *Guerriero prudente, e politico*. As had to be expected from a manual of political behaviour, *Il Guerriero prudente* makes extensive use of contemporary examples, both successful and less successful. In *Vite, et azioni di personaggi militari, e politici*, Priorato foregoes, for the most part, the theoretical approach which he uses in *Il Guerriero*, and goes straight to the examples themselves. The book consists of brief biographies of officers, diplomats, ministers and bishops, some of them from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, some Priorato's contemporaries. Many of the biographies are followed by a brief evaluation of the political and military skills of the persons described, in which aspects of rationality and discursive competence are often emphasised. The qualities which are singled out are, as a rule, military success, pragmatism ('ragione'), eloquence and power of persuasion. Thus, concluding the description of the life of Hans Georg von Arnim, military commander in the Thirty Years' War, Priorato notes: 'His ability to persuade was miraculous, and there were few who did not follow his advice . . . In arguing, he valued reason above all. Making decisions, he considered the instability of the times, and before acting he calculated the outcomes by the example of others. A great politician and expert captain (*Gran Politico, & esperto Capitano*)'.<sup>25</sup>

One characteristic, obvious in Priorato's early books, makes him an unlikely exponent of the Habsburg doctrine of dynastic virtue: for Priorato, political and military brilliance are, from the outset, individual achievements, not transferrable to whole families. In the introduction to *Vite et azioni*, he mentions that, in the same manner that Sansovino wrote about illustrious families, he prefers to discuss the quality of persons, since experience shows that many scions of noble stock fall victim to degeneration.<sup>26</sup> Nor is political competence, according to Priorato, a privilege of those who

<sup>24</sup> Giuliana Tosso Rodinis, *Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, un moralista Veneto* (see n. 6) passim.

<sup>25</sup> Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Vite et azioni di personaggi militari, e politici*, 2nd edn. (Vienna, 1674).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 'A chi legge', n.p.

share his religion: he warns in the address to the reader that references to persons hostile to Catholic faith should not prejudice his work, since he judges their actions and not their conscience.<sup>27</sup> Following this minimalist interpretation of political virtue, echoing earlier civic humanists<sup>28</sup> and far removed from the Christian politics of both Erasmus and Gattinara, Priorato has no scruples including in his cohort of illustrious politicians also Oliver Cromwell, viewed by many not only in the Catholic world of his day primarily as regicide. It is exactly Cromwell's life that leads Priorato to another conclusion concerning the attainment of political success: 'And let it be noted from this extraordinary example, that not [only] the nobility of birth, nor riches . . . qualify one for [high] office, as it usually solely happens, but that it is the opportunity that, like fire, which refines even the impurest metals, wakes up the spirits, and sharpens the minds.'<sup>29</sup> This is, of course, an allusion to Stoic philosophy filtered through the sieve of civic humanism: Poggio Bracciolini had quoted Seneca to the effect that a noble soul enables a man to overcome the mutability of fortune and to attain a more suitable standing in society.<sup>30</sup> The fact that Priorato later piously adds a sentence concerning the nothingness to which Cromwell's power came after his death does not change much in the way of perception of success as a matter of opportunity and individual achievement.

The model of political and military competence constructed by Priorato in *Il Guerriero prudente* and *Vite et azioni di personaggi militari, e politici* is well-defined, and rests on the pillars of experience, rationality, opportunity and prudence. Giuliana Tosso Rodinis is probably right in placing him both in the Renaissance Florentine tradition and in the same cohort with Larochefoucauld. The tendency to emphasise secular political interests and to omit spiritual interpretations of political affairs is prominent in these earlier works, written long before he began to write for the Habsburgs.

The question remains, where does this clear-cut secular model of competence come in when Priorato is faced with the task of describing the life and actions of his last patron, Leopold I, and his ancestors, who were

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Even before Machiavelli, civic humanists tended to prefer cardinal virtues directly related to the government of commonwealths over Christian virtues, and sometimes even opposed the two sets of virtues on the basis that Christian virtues, in the hands of ecclesiastical government, could be used as a cover for misuse of power—see e.g. Arjo Vanderjagt's discussion of the rhetoric of Stefano Porcari. Arjo Vanderjagt, *Qui sa Vartu Anoblist*. (see Chapter I, n. 6).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., f. 245.

<sup>30</sup> Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini, *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1538), p. 80.

engaged in confessional wars and whose earlier (and later) apologists prided themselves on their fiercely confessional motivation?

*Priorato's Model Applied to the Habsburgs*

*Contextualising Competence: The Field of Politics*

As a court historian par excellence, Priorato had to create a history that would, from beginning to end, conform to the expectations of the commissioning monarch and his or her court. Part of his task was presenting his patron of the day or his ancestors as successful rulers. In doing this, Priorato shows remarkable sensitivity towards the predominant models developed before him by the dynasty's apologists, even when those contrast sharply with the general style of his history. Thus, while he is not ready to imbue virtually every episode of the Thirty Years' War with religious meaning (as Vernulaeus, Lothicus and others before him were prepared to do), he is more than ready to pay lip service to the preferred virtues of the dynasty, as when describing Ferdinand II as both extraordinarily zealous<sup>31</sup> and full of clemency: 'In short, he was almost without fault (*quasi senza difetto*), except for his superfluous goodness, which is a virtue in private persons, but in sovereigns sometimes causes the scorn of others, for subjects become perverted and start scorning those laws whereof they do not feel the rigour.'<sup>32</sup> In other cases, Priorato simply stated that a Habsburg ruler he was about to describe had the necessary makings of a successful leader: thus, speaking of Ferdinand III in the introduction to his history, he notes that his realms, tossed by Fortune, needed at that time 'a head no less endowed with talent than that fearless, valorous, and prudent emperor'.<sup>33</sup> A somewhat unexpectedly triumphant image is projected by Priorato in the introduction to *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare*. Beginning his history of the young Leopold I, Priorato promises his reader a description of 'the actions of an emperor not less just, clement, and pious, than victorious, glorious and fortunate'.<sup>34</sup> Despite this promise, it has been noted

<sup>31</sup> 'osservando, e facendo osservare nè suoi stati pontualmente I decreti de sommi Pontefici'—Priorato, *Historia di Ferdinando* (see n. 10), p. 615.

<sup>32</sup> 'fa divenir i sudditi perversi, e sprezzatori di quelle leggi delle quali non paventano il rigore'—*Ibid.*, p. 616.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Sommario', n.p.

<sup>34</sup> 'le attioni d'un Imperatore non meno Giusto, Clemente, e Pio, ch' Invitto, Glorioso e Fortunato'—Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare* (see n. 19), I, 'A chi legge', n.p.

by later historians that Leopold is by no means the central figure of the narrative in *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare*.<sup>35</sup> The question is, why is this so?

There can be little doubt that on the whole Priorato's history supports his last patron's claim to political and military competence. Indeed, when Leopold is for the first time introduced to the reader on page 15 of *Historia* (his turn comes after the immediate political context in the beginning of his reign is described), he is stated to be capable enough: '*...del governo de Regni hereditarii mostro capacita, & applicatione corrispondente al bisogno*'.<sup>36</sup> He is also, as we soon find, modest (in commanding Priorato 'to write without adulation, and with respect towards the great, be they even enemies'), majestic without being arrogant, pious, prudent in letting the resolution of even most pressing affairs to take its due course, and even courageous—'but circumspectly', through military intermediaries. To round up this brief and necessary deviation from his story of diplomatic negotiations and military campaigns, Priorato throws in a passage of elaborate praise much in the style of Leopoldine court operas.<sup>37</sup> Apart from this necessary minimum of desirable characterisation, however, Priorato does not spend much time on detailed discussion of the actions, or the political and military qualities, of Leopold I. Instead, he turns to the description of political and military events as such, by no means limiting himself to the confines of Holy Roman Empire or of the Hereditary Lands.

It is perhaps not a mere matter of style that Priorato chooses to fill the pages of *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare* with descriptions of events that happened far from the court of Vienna and sometimes had only mediated impact on the Empire's or the Habsburgs' political affairs—such as the sea battles between the English and the Dutch, or the complexities of elections of the king of Poland. The reasons and motives of political actions are for him, rather like they would be much later for nineteenth- and twentieth-century diplomatic and military historians, a matter of sophisticated play of interests of various states, in which circumstances are objective, while political choices made by the actors may depend on their capacity to make the best of the circumstances, much less on their moral qualities. In this, Priorato differs sharply from the German historians of Leopold I,

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<sup>35</sup> Jutta Schumann, *Die andere Sonne. Kaiserbild und Medienstrategien im Zeitalter Leopolds I.*, (Berlin, 2004) p. 289.

<sup>36</sup> Priorato, *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare* (see n. 34), I, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

such as Rinck and Wagner,<sup>38</sup> and from the emperor's Austrian apologists in the 1660s and 70s. For Priorato, Leopold's early history is mostly concerned with what today could be termed interstate relations in Europe after the Peace of Westphalia. Relations with Leopold's nominal vassals in the Empire also fall into that category, while relations with the Austrian subjects as such play virtually no role in the history.

The main arena of politics is firmly placed outside the ruler's hereditary domains, and his relations with institutionalised interests of subjects (such as the Estates of Hereditary Lands) are either secondary, or simply irrelevant when compared to the all-important matters of his relations with other sovereigns. When (in Book II of Volume I) Priorato turns to the imperial election of Leopold I, he makes it into a long story of international political circumstances and negotiations, outlining or guessing the considerations of all parties involved. For Priorato, the election of an emperor is very much a matter of *Realpolitik*. He tells the reader what he knows of the backstage of European diplomacy, as long as this does not prejudice the principle of respect for '*i grandi*' requested by his employer. In line with the importance of ceremonial for seventeenth-century court diplomacy,<sup>39</sup> descriptions of ceremonies and festivities make up another considerable part of his narrative, possibly recommended by the interested authorities at the court of Vienna, which, according to Peter Moraw, were by no means above meddling in and supervising Priorato's work.<sup>40</sup> Priorato uses descriptions of festivities as occasions to pay compliments to the governments on whose favour he had depended in the past and could depend again—not only to the court of Vienna for the spectacles staged on the occasion of the emperor's wedding, but also, for example, to the Republic of Venice for spending much on festivities in honour of Leopold's bride Margarita Teresa, 'as it has always done in honour of her illustrious ancestors and other princes who passed through its domain', despite the fact that its finances were badly depleted after the war with the Ottomans.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> On Rinck, see below, Chapter V.; Franz Wagner, *Historia Leopoldi Magni Caesaris Augusti* (Augsburg, 1719).

<sup>39</sup> See Jorg Johann Berns, Thomas Rahn (eds.), *Zeremoniell als höfische Ästhetik in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, (Tübingen, 1995).

<sup>40</sup> On the influence of court policy and censorship on Priorato's writing, see Peter Moraw, 'Kaiser und Geschichtsschreiber um 1700', *Die Welt als Geschichte*, 22 (1962), p. 184.

<sup>41</sup> Priorato, *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare* (see n. 34), III, p. 36.



*Civic Humanism, raison d'etat and the Incompetence of Subjects*

Priorato's attention is only turned back to home affairs in the emperor's hereditary domains in the fourth, additional volume, *Continuatione dell' historia di Leopoldo Cesare nella quale si describe la Ribellione d'Ungheria*, published in 1676. It is here that the previously slow and winding story of European politics suddenly changes into a dynamic account of one rebellion, which gives occasion for the writer to dwell on aspects of sovereignty, obligation and political competence that remained less clearly outlined in *Historia di Leopoldo Cesare*. In Hungary, Priorato finds sufficient material for exercising his judgement concerning what is and what is not competent political behaviour, while also criticising the alternative scheme of argumentation used by rebellious Hungarian magnates, which it is his duty to discredit post factum.

On very few occasions Priorato does describe Leopold's individual actions in the political field. The central qualities that these descriptions attribute to the emperor are caution and prudence combined with a good knowledge of political circumstances. Thus, at a certain point Leopold is described as unwilling to commit himself to a militant course of action, urged by Spain. He is quoted answering the Spanish ambassador that

although he appreciates his zeal for the House of Austria, he will not give an answer, before he knows what the Queen (regent for Charles II of Spain) has answered to the Most Christian King concerning the offered terms, or whether the king would move his armies to Flanders before obtaining the reply from the Queen... He understands very well that some wish that he should enter war before all the others, since France, not having (yet) entered the war, can use his declaration as a motive to declare war on him... The ambassador also knows very well, how many times His Majesty, through his ambassadors in Spain, noted the need he has of monetary subsidies, to increase and sustain his troops for such a need as at present arises, and how many times such a subsidy was promised, but never paid.<sup>42</sup>

This is very much in line with the advice given by Priorato thirty years earlier in *Il Guerriero prudente*, which describes accumulating necessary finance as one of the foremost preconditions of successful warfare.

The opposite of prudence in Priorato's taxonomy of competence is superfluous striving for glory. Thus, in advocating prudent behaviour in *Il Guerriero prudente*, Priorato criticises Frederic of the Palatinate, 'whom the desire of glory made lose the position of elector in hope to attain the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., III, p. 341.



crown of Bohemia'.<sup>43</sup> A critique of thirst for glory is very much in line with the traditions of Italian civic humanism. Since the fifteenth century, thirst for glory per se was frowned upon by the normative literature promoting notions of inner nobility, as can be seen from the humanist version of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* that was well known both in Italy and at the court of Burgundy.<sup>44</sup> The dichotomy of prudence (competence) and individual quest for glory (incompetence) is thoroughly exploited by Priorato in his narrative of the Hungarian rebellion in the *Continuazione*.

The *Continuazione* is more than a mere account of recent events, it is almost a political treatise. The address to the reader points out its didactic purposes: the example of the magnates' rebellion should teach the readers to avoid 'the cliffs on which men of voracious ambition have so miserably shipwrecked'. Ambition and desire for self-aggrandisement, Priorato adds, putting on his hat of political moralist, lead people to the abyss of irreparable ruin. The example set in his story by the punishment of the malcontents should serve as 'veritable precept of civic life' (*i veri precetti della vita civile*).<sup>45</sup> The *Continuazione* is, thus, an account endowed with an articulate didactic message concerning political behaviour—at least, the political behaviour of subjects.

If Priorato's interpretation of the causes of rebellion may have more to do with the doctrine of political obligation he is expected to promote, his account of the events preceding the rebellion is another exercise in pragmatic thinking. His version of the reasons why Hungary became part of the Habsburgs' domains and had to stay that way is particularly interesting. For Priorato, the initial causes that led to the Habsburg succession in the Kingdom of Hungary are down-to-earth and have little to do with divine providence. He claims that since the Hungarians were no longer able to defend themselves and had no other king to turn to for protection than the House of Austria (more powerful in the military sense than any other neighbour was at the time in question), the Austrian succession was perfectly justified. Hungarians, however, were not happy with 'the Germans' owing to a 'natural antypathy' (*antipatia naturale*) and to their wishful thinking, desiring to be able to do on their own what their ancestors had been able to do.<sup>46</sup> Hence their treacherous behaviour towards

<sup>43</sup> Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Il Guerriero prudente, e politico* (Venice, 1640), pp. 3–4.

<sup>44</sup> Arjo Vanderjagt, *Qui sa vertu anoblist* (see Chapter I, n. 6), pp. 157–161.

<sup>45</sup> Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Continuazione della Historia di Leopoldo Cesare* (Vienna, 1676), 'A chi legge'.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the Germans during the siege of Váradin when the Palatine Wesselényi promised that the Hungarians would come to support the imperial troops, and instead many imperial soldiers after their defeat were killed by looting Hungarian peasants.<sup>47</sup> The Hungarians, Priorato points out, were to be blamed for the loss of Neuhäusel, while the subsequent victories were due to the Imperial forces. Thus the image of the Hungarian noble elite as an unreasonable, incompetent and generally malicious political force emerges and gradually acquires new features as the narrative progresses.

The discussion of the protests of Hungarian nobility against the peace of Vasvár is also interesting from this point of view.<sup>48</sup> First, Priorato faithfully relates the main points presented by the Hungarians—that the kingdom was suffering from unfounded presence of foreign troops, that the peace treaty was concluded without their participation, and part of the country was lost without their notice, that the principal offices of the kingdom were, although conferred on Hungarians, not supported by proper military authority, that the liberty conceded to those of Protestant religion was not maintained, churches were taken away by force and ministers expelled, that the privilege of magnates of the kingdom to be judged by the tribunals of the kingdom and not by foreigners was not maintained, and while the emperor enjoyed the taxes collected from the land and the incomes from the exploitation of the mines, Turks were not chased away from the lands, and on the contrary, they continued taking tribute from villages and selling peasants into slavery.<sup>49</sup>

Following this enumeration of Hungarian magnates' grievances, an extended summary of the replies given to them by royal authorities is given, embellished by the author's own commentaries. The commentaries proceed directly from the repertory of civic humanism reinforced by *raison d'état*, the political creed that provides the discursive framework for Priorato's argumentation. Thus, if the Hungarians are concerned about the presence of foreign troops, Priorato stresses that it was according to 'all reasons of good government' that Leopold should keep troops in

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> John Spielman in *Leopold I of Austria* (London and New York, 1977) simply speaks of the discontent of Hungarian nobles with the peace of Vasvár. Jean Béranger in *Leopold I<sup>er</sup> fondateur de la puissance autrichienne* (Paris, 2004) describes the disillusionment of Hungarian nobles after the peace of Vasvár as so complete that they forgot their internal divisions, still very evident at the Diet of 1662. (p. 276) 'Le 9 decembre 1664, les conseillers hongrois appelés en consultation à Vienne manifestaient leur désaccord avec les termes du traité de Vasvár.' (p. 278).

<sup>49</sup> Priorato, *Continuatione della Historia* (see n. 45), pp. 5–6.

Hungary. With Turkish forces in Transylvania directly threatening his territories, Leopold had more reason than other emperors 'to keep himself armed'. As to the damage done by the presence of the troops, 'there can be no reflections of (private) liberties or privileges if that prejudices the public good'.<sup>50</sup> The answer concerning the lack of support lent to Hungarians occupying high offices of the kingdom is even more elucidating. 'It was only due to the incomparable clemency of His Imperial Majesty that the principal offices in Hungary were conferred on subjects little practiced in the military art', since 'there was none among the Hungarian nationals at that moment' with military experience to speak of, 'who would have commanded a siege, or assault on a fortress, or led the troops in a field battle'. Thus, it would be 'inappropriate' to give so much authority to someone 'who would only apply it to make quick attacks, and so disturb the Ottomans against peace'. If left to their own devices, the Hungarians would not have been able to defend fortresses and towns. This diatribe is followed by a characteristic remark contrasting personal bravery exhibited by Hungarian noblemen and *raison d'état*, thinly disguised as service to the *patria*: 'And if some of them had committed some extreme and successful acts of valour, those resulted in increasing the glory of their names, but were of little advantage to Christendom, or to their fatherland.'<sup>51</sup> The Hungarians may be capable of obtaining (and thirsting for) individual glory, but that only casts their political competence in greater doubt.

This image of Leopold's Hungarian subjects as precocious warriors lacking expertise, driven by desire for personal glory and negligent of public good (and thus unfit for high office) is further complemented by statements concerning their poor management abilities: while the mines which were in the possession of the House of Austria had been a reliable source of considerable income since persons 'of zeal, sound judgement and intelligence' were appointed to run them, the mines that remained in the hands of Hungarians were less useful, 'which can be seen from the example of the mines of Nagybanya, as neglected as they are (now) obscure, since they were applied to the personal interest [of those who managed them] without slightest understanding of how useful they would be if well managed by others'.<sup>52</sup> The Hungarians are, thus, shown as incapable of managing well even if it is in their own interest.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

The limited effect of raised taxes on successful warfare is explained by the likelihood of bad administrators appropriating the money; the limited rights of Hungarian Protestants by the behaviour of the First Estate—that is, Hungarian prelates, as well as by the Protestants' own self-seeking behaviour at the Diet of 1662, when they opposed every document concerning 'the business of state' claiming that the satisfaction of their 'private demands' was primary. The privileges of the magnates, on the other hand, like all privileges, had to be based on merit (*merito*).

So far, the line of argumentation espoused by Priorato is impeccably in accordance with the concept of nobility and public good as exhibited both by the Italian civic humanists and by the Burgundians, but a difference between their concept of merit and that of Priorato becomes obvious in the next argument. Having stated that Hungarian privileges, like any privileges, have to be based on merit, Priorato adds that open rebellion, for one, would always be a sign that merit was lacking, thus leaving no ground for the privilege to remain.<sup>53</sup>

Very little reference is made to the main point around which those less happy with the emperor's Hungarian policies in fact coalesced—that is, the peace treaty of Vasvár itself. The few explanations that are given are very much in the tradition of *arcana imperii*: 'His Imperial Majesty was induced to conclude the peace treaty by many considerations', and in particular for it was 'difficult to maintain war where the people are contrary'. As to participation in the negotiations, the magnates were acquainted with 'the instructions and authority of those who were appointed to negotiate the peace', so it cannot be said that it was concluded without giving them any notice.<sup>54</sup>

Whether the scarcity of these explanations is due to court censorship, Priorato's reluctance to dwell on the less brilliant aspects of Leopold's government or his adherence to the *arcana imperii* school where political communication is concerned,<sup>55</sup> is difficult to say, however one thing is clear: Priorato sees no inevitable need to dwell extensively on the motivation behind the actions of the monarch and his high officials vis-à-vis the subjects, as the monarch owes them no explanation of the kind he gives to the Spanish ambassador as a representative of another sovereign. It is

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> On the influence of the political topos of *arcana imperii* in Germany, see F. Schneider, *Pressefreiheit und politische Öffentlichkeit. Studien zur politischen Geschichte Deutschlands bis 1848* (Neuwied/Bonn, 1966), pp. 56–9.

the lacking merit and the incompetence of the Hungarian subjects that forms the subject matter of his narrative. Unlike the Burgundian historians dwelling on the differences between the dukes and their rebellious subjects, Priorato painstakingly adheres to the creed that disobedience on behalf of the subjects is criminal. Like in the majority of Habsburg histories since *Weisskunig*, there is no negotiation of the boundary between disobedience and legitimate articulation of the subjects' distinct interests—and in Priorato's case, the rhetoric of *raison d'état* is called upon to justify this approach.

The political and personal portraits of the main protagonists of the rebellion take up a large part of the book. Thus, Peter Zrinyi is shown throughout as an extremely ambitious, even if sadly incompetent leader, whose mistakes, beginning with his wish to be appointed general, were largely owing to the negative influence coming from various sources including his even more ambitious wife and—remarkably—the news industry:

Count Peter Zrinyi travelled to the imperial court which was at that moment in Ratisbon, misled and full of hopes owing to the fame (*invaghito, e insperanzato dalla fama*), which resounded in all lands through the public gazettes and among the people, further magnifying his admirable courage... It did not appear a good thing to the Imperial Council, to raise subjects to such greatness, that later only with difficulty they let subside the vapours which great dignities and new honours generate in the heads of the ambitious, and none were more so than the Zrinyi brothers.<sup>56</sup>

Ironically, Priorato undermines the moral message concerning the dangers of ambition by telling the reader that in fact Prince Auersperg, the emperor's minister whose brother was interested in the same position as Zrinyi, was opposed to his appointment. We are dealing, thus, with an ambiguous interpretation, in which the author's own tendency to speak of politics as a matter of competing interests and pragmatic considerations sometimes comes into conflict with the didactic task he was given or had assumed in the service of Leopold I. Reconciling these two perspectives becomes easier as Zrinyi's behaviour turns, according to Priorato, increasingly unreasonable: thus, he sustains military losses in conflict with the Turks in Croatia owing to the illusion of luck and continuing intoxication from previous victories: '*Quivi il medesimo Conte Pietro, ostentando il suo*

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<sup>56</sup> Priorato, *Continuatione della Historia* (see n. 45), pp. 23–4.

*valore per la ottenuta vittoria, si lusingava d'esser fortunato...*<sup>57</sup> Giving in to illusions, thus, leads to military incompetence.

As the narrative progresses, the behaviour of leading magnates increasingly falls into the category of treason, and Priorato continues to mix and match his arguments from two registers—that of moral judgement and that of practical expediency, sometimes making little difference between the two. Thus, when the conspirators turn to the Ottomans in hope to secure military support for their uprising in exchange for promises of political allegiance, he notes:

The Turks, who are good politicians (*buoni politici*), having considered the quality of those rebels, could not believe it other than mad that the Hungarians, in their bestiality, rebelled against their Christian prince, from whom they could hope for advancement in war and peace, and wanted to subject themselves to the Turks... and that they imagined they would be followed by those nations that knew all too well that it is better to be subjects of a great monarch than to obey a new prince who would rule in Upper Hungary alone, and another of Croatia, who on their own did not have the power to maintain their royal dignity, asking for help from the Turk, by whom, instead of being raised [above their present state] they would be oppressed.<sup>58</sup>

The Turks, thus, are praised for possessing better political judgement than the rebellious Hungarian Christians, and showing, on the whole, a better understanding of the mechanics of war and state. Priorato accords them the title of 'good politicians' without qualms, even though for him the term bears no negative connotations. This is a kind of competence that has little to do with moral theology—as Priorato himself puts it in the introduction to *Vite et azioni di personaggi militari, e politici*, his judgment is of actions, not of consciences (*le azzioni, e non le coscienze*).<sup>59</sup> A claim to rule, as we can see from this passage, rests on the ability to maintain one's rule by force. This is in line both with the concept of magnificence that was espoused by official historians of the dynasty in the fifteenth century<sup>60</sup> and, most obviously, with the precepts of *The Prince*. In fact, Priorato in his works often uses the classical Machiavellian formula of '*preservare lo Stato*'. This is contrary to the claims expressed by some contemporary historians—most remarkably, by Robert Bireley—that the military doctrine of the Austrian Habsburgs in the mid-seventeenth century was

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>59</sup> Gualdo Priorato, *Vite et azioni di personaggi militari, e politici* (see n. 25), n.p.

<sup>60</sup> See above, Chapter I, p. 43.

invariably anti-Machiavellian and uncompromising in its adherence to Bellarmine.<sup>61</sup>

Since, owing to the inexperienced actions of Hungarian magnates, the logic of politics and the logic of political obligation converge, there is no dilemma concerning the legitimacy of the actions of Leopold and his ministers once the rebellion has failed. Both aspects of Priorato's persona, the baroque apologist of a pious Catholic monarch and the heir of Florentine political philosophy, coincide in their approval of repressive measures taken towards the rebels. As baroque apologist, Priorato is careful to stress that the promises given by imperial government to the priest sent to Zrinyi with a message from Vienna after the rebellion had been discovered, and inviting him to submit himself to the emperor, were 'general, not special or *obligatorie*'—thus, no pardon had been promised, therefore none was given.<sup>62</sup> And while some space is accorded, posthumously, to Zrinyi's own version of events—his letter to the emperor, written when he was already imprisoned in Vienna, is translated and reprinted in the book—it is followed by the historian's laconic remark that since 'the birds were now in the cage' and since it was clear that Zrinyi had not disclosed all of his crimes in the letter anyway, an incomplete confession deserved no pardon.<sup>63</sup> It is difficult to see which of the arguments has more weight in Priorato's eyes—the moral or the pragmatic one.

Priorato concludes the story of the conspirators with a didactic statement to the effect that Fortune is cruel, and there are great dangers inherent in desiring too much, thus conforming to the tradition widespread in the Habsburg apologetics of the period and making a moral example of the rebel magnates.<sup>64</sup> His illustrations on the topic of political (in)competence, however, do not end at that.

While the Hungarian magnates are cast in the role of bad politicians showing exemplary incompetence, those appointed by Leopold to rule over Hungary in his name once it is reduced to obedience are commended for proper military experience and political loyalty. Thus, the choice of the candidate for the office of Governor General (the office of Palatine was suppressed in the constitutional changes introduced by Leopold in

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<sup>61</sup> Robert Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince; anti-Macchiavellianism or Catholic statecraft in early modern Europe* (London, 1990), p. 40.

<sup>62</sup> Priorato, *Continuatione della Historia* (see n. 45), p. 66.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138–9. On the portrayal of rebels and rebellion in Leopoldine court opera and other texts, see M. Goloubeva, *Glorification of Emperor Leopold I in Image, Spectacle and Text* (Mainz, 2000) Chapter VII.



the early 1670s) is explained in terms of search for a person 'of authority, zeal in his service, and of military and political intelligence'. The military career of the successful candidate, Grand Master of the German Order, Ampringen, including his previous involvement in war against the Ottomans and some actions accenting his loyalty to Leopold, is described as proof of his competence.<sup>65</sup>

As in the previous three volumes of *Historia*, commentary on the causes of the emperor's actions is scarce, but it consistently attributes prudence to Leopold's actions. The motives ascribed to Leopold fall into two categories—that of practical politics and that describing motivation of a higher order. Thus, when Leopold decides, after the death of Palatine Wesselényi, not to appoint another Palatine in Hungary, he is 'inspired, one could believe, by God, who visibly assists him in his piety and innocence'. At the same time, he acts on experience, 'having seen that those subjects that are ambitious and avid followers of their own interest, rather than of the service of their master, will increase their claims, hoping for better things in the future, forgetting what they already have, rushing towards uncertain hopes'.<sup>66</sup> He is also obliged to rely on 'his loyal Germans' (*suoi Alemanni fedeli*), since 'from experience he knows that it is impossible to rely on Hungarians, nor to believe their words... none of them rushed to help in the battle of St Gotthard on the Raab, which was won by the valour of the Germans and foreigners, without whom the Hungarians would have lost, and with that they would have lost the remains of their kingdom, and their own freedom'.<sup>67</sup>

There is, thus, a consistent model of legitimacy closely tied to pragmatic expediency and practical competence, a model almost Hobbesian in its justification of power as long as it serves the purpose of preserving the state, present throughout Priorato's work for the Habsburg court in Vienna.

In view of another history of Leopold's reign, discussed in the next chapter, it is also worth noticing that Priorato's work introduces a distinct anti-Hungarian streak into the official and semi-official historiography of the court of Vienna. As a mere hypothesis, it is tempting to regard this feature as arising both from the specific events which Priorato had to describe (i.e. the rebellion in Hungary) and also from the need for identifying a new

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<sup>65</sup> Priorato, *Continuatione della Historia* (see n. 45), pp. 140–1.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*



enemy once the issue of heresy was no longer a marker of unquestionable wickedness in dynastic historiography. In later decades, the emphasis on Hungarians as internal enemies would be preserved, while a new external enemy would be identified in the person of Louis XIV and the model of politics he was assumed to stand for.

If the question concerning the presence of a model of competence divorced from the precepts of moral theology, which shaped most of the official political discourse in the Habsburg domains in the seventeenth century,<sup>68</sup> can be answered on the basis of Priorato's work as court historian, the answer can be a more or less certain 'yes'. Priorato's narrative systematically makes references to aspects of government and war that are not imbued with religious or moral meaning, but are, in his opinion, crucial to the practical success of one who governs and makes war. Claiming exceptional political competence for himself (much more articulately than any of the Habsburg historians before him), Priorato applies his own model of political competence—as a set of standards by which to measure political and military actions—to virtually all persons involved in the events he describes, though less frequently to the rulers themselves. Significantly, he brings dynastic historiography back to the precepts of princely civic humanism, as espoused once by Burgundian translators of Italian humanist texts, and his narrative divorces political action—and judgements of political competence—from the goals of imposing one true religion in the Habsburg domains and elsewhere. The political field is once again viewed as complex and wrought with compromises, but this time, only the ruling dynasties are invested by the historian with legitimacy for political action.

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<sup>68</sup> See, for example, the articles on the representation of German Catholic rulers in K. Repgen (ed.), *Das Herrscherbild im 17. Jahrhundert* (Münster, 1991).



## CHAPTER FIVE

### MISMANAGEMENT AND OTHER VIRTUES: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SECULAR POLITICAL COMPETENCE IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF GOTTLIEB EUCHARIUS RINCK

If Priorato managed to restore secular political discourse to Habsburg historiography, staying within the reference frame of civic humanism, another notable historian of the reign of Leopold I, Gottlieb Eucharius Rinck, came from a vastly different tradition. Rinck was a Protestant and a student of the major German political theorist of his time, Christian Thomasius.<sup>1</sup> Thomasius (1655–1728) was a scholar of public and church law and an outspoken opponent of political coercion in matters of religion in the confessional state. His ideas, as a recent study illustrates, can be compared to the arguments of John Locke, though their impact in the German-speaking lands was perhaps more modest than the impact of Locke in England.<sup>2</sup> By placing Rinck's biography of Leopold I in context with Thomasius's doctrine of the state, it should be possible to explore how a secular model of political competence coming from entirely different origins than that of Priorato entered Habsburg historiography around 1700.

#### *Rinck and the Claim to Objectivity*

While Priorato's logic is that of court historian, unabashedly working on a commission and doing it conscientiously to the best of his ability and expertise, Rinck's motivation in undertaking the task of writing the emperor's biography shortly after the latter's death in 1705 is different. As an academic (albeit also a fashionable man of the world, as one German

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<sup>1</sup> A number of recent works re-interpret the doctrines of Christian Thomasius in view of the current developments in the history of political philosophy and even in literary theory. See especially Martin Kühnel, *Das politische Denken von Christian Thomasius* (Berlin 2001), and Herbert Jaumann, Manfred Beetz (eds.), *Thomasius im literarischen Feld. Neue Beiträge zur Erforschung seines Werkes im historischen Kontext* (Tübingen, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Ian Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State. The Political Thought of Christian Thomasius, Ideas in Context*, 87 (Cambridge, 2007).

biographical dictionary claims),<sup>3</sup> Rinck pursued as his main goal a more complete and a more objective history of Leopold's long reign (1658–1705) than any written before him. He says as much in the introduction to his work. While the text of the work itself speaks possibly also of other motives, such as settling the doubts of fellow Protestants within the Empire concerning the soundness of the emperor's personality and politics, the claim to objectivity and exhaustiveness is to some extent born out by Rinck's biography of the emperor.

Rinck begins by making the modest claim that any biography of Leopold he or any other writer could provide would be inferior by definition, since only the emperor himself could have written a perfect account of his life and reign:

One could only wish that he, like Julius Caesar, or like the warlike Maximilian I, should have described his life himself, so that we could have some description of it that would be perfect, like his government. Since, however, the world was not granted such happiness, we shall still bring forward whatever possible about it, even though it speaks of him only fragmentarily, and bears witness to the excellence of the whole, like a reflection (tells us of) a precious stone.<sup>4</sup>

The claim is unusual for a period when the genre of court historiography had been long established throughout Europe, and when it was commonplace to doubt the impartiality of histories written under the auspices of various governments,<sup>5</sup> let alone histories dictated by monarchs themselves. History writers, even those working directly at the courts of princes, were aware of the danger of appearing partial to their readers, as a well-known letter by Pellisson to Colbert on writing the history of Louis XIV testifies. The letter, brilliantly analysed by Louis Marin in *Portrait du Roi*,

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<sup>3</sup> On Rinck, see *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, 1889 (reprint Berlin, 1970), v. 28, pp. 645–6. The biographical article claims, among other things, that the future professor of public and canon law at Altdorf began his career there by lecturing on 'die Kunst der feinen Lebensart'. On Rinck as a historian of Leopold I in the context of Habsburg historiography, see Anna Coreth, *Österreichische Geschichtsschreibung in der Barockzeit: 1620–1740* (Vienna, 1950), pp. 75–7.

<sup>4</sup> 'Es wäre zu wünschen, dass er, als Julius Caesar, oder der streitbare Maximilianus I, sein Leben selbst beschrieben, damit wir etwas davon hätten, welches ohne Mangel, wie seine Regierung: nachdem aber der Welt dieses Glück nicht gegönnet worden, so heben wir doch billig dasjenige von ihm auf, welches nur stückweise von ihm handelt, und welches von Vortrefflichkeit des Ganzen, wie ein Absprung von einem Edelgestein, Zeugnis stellen kann.' Gottlieb Eucharius Rinck, *Leopolds des Grossen... wunderwürdiges Leben und Thaten*, 3rd edn., 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1713), I, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Brendan Dooley, 'News and doubt in early modern culture' (see Ch. IV, n. 20), pp. 278–9.

warns against the problematic credibility of official royal historiography: 'The King must be praised everywhere but, so to speak, without praise, by a narrative of all that he has been seen to do, say, and think . . . It would no doubt be hoped that His Majesty approve and accept this design, which can almost not be well executed without him. But he must not seem to have accepted, known about, or ordered it.'<sup>6</sup>

The pit into which Pellisson is afraid his narrative might fall—that of critique of partiality coming from discerning readers—obviously does not concern Rinck when he conjures in his mind the image of a perfect ('*ohne Mangel*') narrative of Leopold's reign, that coming from the emperor himself. Rinck is, nevertheless, aware of the limitations under which court historians work: he is ready to contend with them for the title to the most truthful and comprehensive account of the emperor's life. By explicitly discarding histories 'written at court',<sup>7</sup> Rinck does acknowledge that at least courtiers, if not virtuous monarchs themselves, might be tempted to distort parts of the truth.

The value of his endeavour consists, according to Rinck, primarily in providing a moral lesson for his readers. Leopold's deeds, he claims, were 'a guideline for his subjects, and an object of admiration for others, therefore there is no doubt that he is worthy to live in the hearts of all people.' Rinck goes on to propose that Leopold's life can be used as a 'book of law' (*Gesetz-buch*) by all those who are virtuous, and 'in it they can see confirmed that if one wishes to please God, one should live like this monarch, always constant and pious in good and bad fortune'.<sup>8</sup> The exact message of the lesson, however, varies according to the particular standing of the reader in the estates society:

The rulers will learn, how to reign; the ministers—how not their advice, but the blessing of their master brings (great) things about; the soldiers—how, even when the forces are small, the right cause and trust in God brings victory; the subjects, how they should be pious and humble before God, since even their crowned sovereign had humbled himself in the lowliest manner, like a poor and wretched man, before God, and invites his subjects to follow that example.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in: Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King* (London, 1989), p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds . . . Leben* (see n. 4), I, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> 'Die Regenten werden erlernen, wie man regieren muss; die Minister/ wie nicht ihr Rath, sondern des Prinzipalen Segen/ die Sache zum Stande bringe; die Soldaten/ wie auch bey der schwächsten Kräften eine gerechte Sache/ und das Vertruen auf Gott/ den Sieg erwerbe; die Unterthanen/ wie sie fromm und demütig für Gott seyn sollen/ nachdem

The conventional message of using a monarch as a moral model, common to all mirrors of the princes but also to many works of late medieval and early modern political philosophy intended for a wider circle of recipients, had a particular local version in the Austrian tradition. At the end of the reign, Johann Adam Schenkel had claimed a similar function for his description of the emperor's life, written in an accessible format for Austrian readers and entitled *Vollständiges Lebens-Diarium... Leopoldi I.*<sup>10</sup> Schenkel's book closely followed the traditions of Catholic moralist writings in praise of the dynasty that had been widespread in the Hereditary Lands during the seventeenth century. It combined Counter-Reformation piety with extravagant praises of the Habsburg rulers and singled out various events in the ruler's life without providing a general historical background or context to these events (a failing that an official court historiographer like Gualdo Priorato could not afford). Given the unabashedly moralistic and ostentatiously pious approach declared by Rinck from the start, one could expect the biography of Leopold written by Rinck to be a kind of moral treatise in the spirit of a *Fürstenspiegel*, presenting a thoroughly flattering image of the emperor for emulation by others. Mirrors of the princes based on dynastic *exempla* were still being written in the Habsburg lands at the end of the seventeenth century, the most elaborate example being probably the *Fürstenspiegel* of the Bohemian official Johann Jacob Weingarten.<sup>11</sup> Rinck's history, however, turns out to be of a vastly different nature. It is neither a collection of exempla, nor a moralist treatise. For the most part, Rinck's narrative is matter-of-fact and maintains its critical distance.

*Justification Strategy: Critique and Vindication of Incompetence*

The most important contrast between the histories of the reign written by Gualdo Priorato and by Rinck respectively is the insistence of the German historian, writing at a much later date, on painstakingly outlining the areas of incompetence and mismanagement in the affairs of state under

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auch ihr gekröntes Oberhaupt in der tiefsten Erniedrigung/ als ein armer und elender Mensch/ sich für Gott demütigt/ und seine Unterthanen zur Nachfolge anfrischet.' Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Johann Adam Schenkel, *Vollständiges Lebens-Diarium... Leopoldi I* (Vienna, 1702).

<sup>11</sup> Johann Jacob von und zu Weingarten, *Fürsten-Spiegel oder Monarchia des hochlöblichen Haus Oesterreichs* (Prague, 1673).

Leopold I, and sometimes tracing those back to the personal weaknesses of the monarch. This becomes especially clear in Rinck's detailed examination of various aspects of war administration and other departments of the imperial and Austrian government. Explicit critique of the way the imperial government functioned during Leopold's reign can be found in Rinck's references to clientelism flourishing at the court of Vienna. The emperor's conscientious approach to the choice of singers for the imperial chapel, 'based on merit and not on favour', is contrasted to the way in which the personnel for the administration in the political field was recruited:

*Wann alle Collegia in Wien auf solche Art untersucht und besetzt worden/  
so ist kein Zweifel/ Wien wäre ein Paradies auf Erden/ ein Sammelplatz der  
Gerechtigkeit/ der freyen Künste/ und allen Tugenden gewest.*<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note the way in which the image of mismanagement is constructed in the above passage—while it would be unacceptable for Rinck and probably for most of his readers to criticise directly the emperor's policies of recruiting personnel for the imperial administration, the biographer finds a subtle discursive stratagem for revealing the lack which cannot be pointed out bluntly: 'If only all the *collegia* in Vienna' were recruited 'thus'—that is, equitably, proceeding from the merit of the office holders—'then would Vienna be a paradise on earth' (but it is not, since the way of recruiting officials into imperial service does not follow the benchmark set by the emperor's musical establishment).

A related issue in connection with which the failures of Leopold's government are brought into the foreground is the management of the court's vast personnel. According to Rinck, the court officials in Leopold's day were still paid the same as two hundred years before. 'They are thus put in a situation, through lack of sustenance, in which they must either accept gifts or starve in all integrity (*"bey aller Gerechtigkeit Hungers zu sterben"*)'. 'It does not become the imperial court and its master that valets, *Trabante*, and others are most villainously seeking tips.'<sup>13</sup>

In a similar, critical way Rinck approaches the individual blunders of his protagonist and the systematic shortcomings of his government. Thus, he notes that the administration of justice at the emperor's court was extremely slow, 'and most people are also of the opinion it could

<sup>12</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds . . . Leben* (see n. 4), I, p. 121.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 171.

have been better provided for'. Procrastination, Rinck hastens to add, is a common thing in all courts of law, but it is known that the emperor's indulgence has 'somewhat contributed to one or another confusion arising there'.<sup>14</sup> When two important noble houses, both having representatives in key positions at court, were involved in a legal suit, the emperor would 'out of his goodness hesitate to cause damage to one or to the other, that is why the proceedings continued for eternity'. While the litigation lasted, the emperor would do all within his powers to try to reconcile the adversaries. 'Some thought, nevertheless, that he could have done more to revive justice in his courts of law'.<sup>15</sup>

Reference to a failure to uphold, or 'revive' justice, was still a grave accusation for a monarch in the early modern period. In the normative model from which the Habsburg dynastic vision of princely virtues developed, justice had held the pride of place. The Burgundian state ideology, which gave new life to the political self-perception of the Habsburgs at the time of the dynastic merger at the end of the fifteenth century, had been predicated upon the prince's ability to maintain perfect justice for the wellbeing of the *chose publique*. Maximilian I seems to have followed his father-in-law's obsession with justice as he followed him in other things.<sup>16</sup> For the Habsburg rulers of the Counter-Reformation period, piety had supplanted justice as the primary princely virtue, yet by no means eclipsed it entirely. Ferdinand II was portrayed by his apologists as a just monarch in the complex political situation in which he had found himself.<sup>17</sup> A critique of a Habsburg emperor's sense of justice was,

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., I, p. 170.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Maximilian was presented as a mirror of justice in the later Habsburg historiography. See, for instance, Johann Jacob von und zu Weingarten, *Richter-Spiegel oder Vorstellung/ mit was Tugend-Qualität- und Eigenschaften ein Richter oder Oberer begabt oder ja selbe zu erlangen befließen seyn...* (Prague, 1682) p. 29. On Maximilian studying the principles of government of Charles the Bold, see Susan Marti's article on Cat. Nr. 48 (Military ordinances of Charles the Bold from the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna) in Susan Marti, Till-Holger Borchert and Gabriele Keck (eds.), *Charles le Temeraire*, exhibition catalogue (Brussels, 2008), p. 221.

<sup>17</sup> Weingarten quotes Lamormaini's apology of Ferdinand II where it is reported that Ferdinand had once said, when suggested that his adherence to justice had led him into great peril: 'Neither danger nor threats should lead me from justice to injustice, even if a whole land were to burn down, even if I had to go begging with my wife and young children.' Weingarten, *Richter-Spiegel* (see n. 15), p. 39. On Lamormaini and Ferdinand II, see Robert Bireley, *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counter-Reformation* (see Ch. III, n. 42).



therefore, a certain break with tradition. Rinck does not deny Leopold's striving for justice—he nevertheless shows that in practical terms, the emperor did not always live up to the ideal, and the effect of this was detrimental for the common good.

The pages dedicated to this and similar critiques make up a substantial part of Rinck's biography of Leopold. Thus, a large section of the text is marked as dealing specifically with the emperor's shortcomings.<sup>18</sup> Other failings for which Rinck criticises the emperor were his indulgence towards those who already failed him once in the performance of their duties, and were then given new charges in government. Dedicating many pages to illustrating this point with several examples, Rinck adds, nevertheless, that despite such oversight on behalf of Leopold, 'God did not take away his blessings from Austria for that—on the contrary, his blessings grew when he saw this mildness'.<sup>19</sup> The descriptions of specific fields of imperial and Austrian government and policies also contain elements of criticism—e.g., in the lengthy description of the military administration under Leopold, not only the most notable victories, but also substantial blunders are mentioned.<sup>20</sup>

Evidence of incompetence, outlined in such detail, had to be balanced rhetorically with some sort of justification strategy if the general impression was to remain positive. Rinck is striving to present a positive image of his protagonist to his audience—therefore, the emperor's incompetence is vindicated in several ways in his biography. The first strategy employed for this purpose is borrowed from the dynastic repertory. In the important opening pages of the book Rinck evokes the well-worn reference frame of *Pietas Austriaca*.<sup>21</sup> The emperor was pious, therefore, according to Rinck, he was ultimately victorious. Rinck makes a point of stressing several times that Leopold's greatness was not a fruit of human effort (therefore, it was also not a direct fruit of human competence). To illustrate this point, Rinck constructs the image of the managerial and military superiority of the emperor's less virtuous competitor and 'hereditary enemy', Louis XIV, speaking of '... *die menschliche und wohlausgesonnene Stärcke von Seiten*

<sup>18</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds... Leben* (see n. 4), I, pp. 163–199.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290 and further.

<sup>21</sup> On the historical context and the rhetoric of *Pietas Austriaca*, see Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca* (Munich, 1959); on the particular application of the topos of dynastic piety to Leopold I, see Maria Goloubeva, *The Glorification of Emperor Leopold I* (Mainz, 2000), Chapter 10.

*Frankreichs*' and adding 'under Louis XIV, all human forces (in France) conspired to achieve the highest power in the world'.<sup>22</sup>

Rinck takes pains to describe not only the military might of France under Louis XIV, but also the Machiavellian character of his diplomacy (Rinck mentions in passing that Louis had traitors ready to serve him at every court) and the allegedly next-to-perfect arrangement of the French king's political administration, in order to create the topos of unsurpassable yet inherently malign power (*Gewalt* rather than *Macht*), which he later shows defeated by a single *coup de foudre* of divine interference on behalf of the virtuous emperor. This interference is nothing short of a miracle, as a passage much later in the book indicates: 'When on the one side human wisdom, cunning, order and strength are engaged, God supports the other side with miracles'. Rinck illustrates this point with a quotation from Leopold's chief enemy: during the Mantuan War, Louis XIV, when informed by his generals that the imperial troops could not enter Italy, was reported to have said '*Je ne crains, qu'une chose, l'Empereur a tousjours un miracle dans sa poche*'.<sup>23</sup>

The device of attributing the emperor's victories to direct divine interference was not new—Leopold's apologists writing before Rinck availed themselves of it extensively,<sup>24</sup> yet what makes its use remarkable in Rinck's biography is the juxtaposition of pious maxims with a down-to-earth analysis of the many faults and failures of imperial government. Where baroque apologists like the Jesuit scholar Wolfgang Eggendorfer and the court librettist count Minato may not have deigned to give a moment's thought to any aspect of government less lofty than the notions of *Pietas*, *Clementia* and *Constantia*,<sup>25</sup> Rinck gets down to the hard work of singling out the more and less successful endeavours of Leopold's reign and of the political establishment over which the emperor presided.

### *Statecraft and Piety: A Precarious Balance*

The aspect of personal shortcomings of the monarch was of course particularly difficult to tackle. In his cameo on Leopold's character (very much

<sup>22</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds . . . Leben* (see n. 4), I, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166–7.

<sup>24</sup> Maria Golubeva, *The Glorification of Emperor Leopold I* (see n. 21), pp. 199–200.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 137–8, on Minato *ibid.*, pp. 49–51, on the praise of Leopold in Minato's libretti *ibid.*, pp. 145–6, 157–8.

in the by then established *portrait du roi* tradition of late-seventeenth-century historiography), Rinck has to handle some sensitive material. That he should choose to do so is of course a matter of free will, as a monarch's biography not touching on the weaknesses of the protagonist's character was quite conceivable during the period. On the other hand, the necessity to handle the perceived shortcomings of Leopold's personality may have sprung from the need to dispel the reservations that the German Protestant audiences could have had about him. Those reservations had substantial grounding in contemporary evidence and ideological texts published in the Protestant lands of the Empire. Anton Reiser's fiery accounts of the sufferings of Hungarian Protestants, printed in Hamburg,<sup>26</sup> were rather widely known, and so were some other accounts—such as the letters of Hungarian Lutherans on the persecutions in Preßburg, published by *Diarium Europaeum* in 1673.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, Catholic apologists of the emperor made no secret of the repression of Protestants in Upper Hungary and of other instances of confessional partisanship that Leopold showed in his day—indeed, they sometimes glorified him specifically as a ruler who shunned toleration.

Rinck resorts to justifying the emperor in the face of Protestant critiques concerning his excessive reliance on the Jesuits and on the Catholic Church as a whole. In this justification, he is induced to deviate from the earlier model of Habsburg political competence, predicated on loyalty to the Catholic Church, which had been in existence at least since the days of Charles V and his Grand Chancellor Gattinara.<sup>28</sup> Confronted with the political turmoil of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the Habsburgs had gravitated towards an increasingly confessional understanding of the rulers' mission and qualities necessary to accomplish that mission. The model of political competence that Robert Bireley has termed 'Catholic statecraft' was developed to perfection by the early-seventeenth-century apologists of the dynasty.<sup>29</sup> It was, however, becoming untenable

<sup>26</sup> Anton Reiser, *Antoni Reisers Fünff unterschiedliche Schrifftten von seiner und anderer evangelischer Lehrer . . . Verfolgung* (Hamburg, 1683).

<sup>27</sup> *Diarium Europaeum*, Continuatio 15 (1673), Kaiserliche Hofgeschichten.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the references to the mission of the emperor in the memoirs of Mercurino of Gattinara, ed. Ilse Kodek, *Der Großkanzler Kaiser Karls V. zieht Bilanz. Die Autobiographie Mercurino Gattinaras aus dem Lateinischen übersetzt* (Münster, 2004), pp. 198–9.

<sup>29</sup> See especially the posthumous re-working of the pro-Habsburg writings of the Flemish scholar Nicolaus Vernulaeus, *Phosphori Austriaci de Gente Austriaca libri tres* (Louvain, 1665), praising the staunchly Catholic stance of Ferdinand II and interpreting the rule of

outside the Hereditary Lands towards the end of the seventeenth century. The reasons for that were many, and they deserve a separate detailed study. The most obvious reason for the decline of the confessional model of statecraft was probably the need to maintain alliances with Protestant powers inside and outside the Empire, both in the wars with the Ottoman Porte and in the ever-renewed conflict with Louis XIV. In this context, the history written by Rinck, a Protestant aiming his writings also at a Protestant audience, provides interesting evidence of the extent to which the glorification of the Habsburgs' policies could be divorced from their traditional confessionalism.

In order to illustrate how Rinck negotiates the delicate terrain of piety and how as a result he arrives at a more secular model of political competence, it may be useful to compare Rinck's representation of Leopold's policies vis-à-vis the Protestants in his hereditary realms to another posthumous representation, originating in the Catholic circles at the court of Vienna.<sup>30</sup> The representation in question is the funerary sermon by Ferdinand Widmann, SJ, one of the court preachers in Vienna. In this text, entitled *Morgenstern bei der Sonne*,<sup>31</sup> the preacher describes at length the departed emperor's services to the Catholic Church, in terms that make Leopold appear as a staunch hard-liner in the vein of Ferdinand II. Widmann constructs his image of the uncompromising emperor through rhetorical accumulation, mounting example upon example, beginning from young Leopold's election to the imperial throne. According to Widmann, at that point, when asked to give more freedom in his hereditary lands to the non-Catholics, Leopold answered that he would rather refuse the imperial crown than allow anything to the prejudice of the Catholic religion and faith. In a similar vein, when asked to permit the existence of non-Catholic schools and churches in Vienna in 1664, Leopold answered that like Ferdinand II he would rather go away from the Empire with a staff in his hand, than harm the faith.<sup>32</sup> This is a direct reference to the

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previous Habsburg emperors in this light. On Catholic statecraft, see Robert Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince* (see Chapter III, n. 49).

<sup>30</sup> The following comparison has been published in Maria Golubeva, 'Crossing the confessional border. Discourses of political competence in contemporaries' evaluations of Leopold I around 1705', in Christine Roll, Frank Pohle, Matthias Myrczek (eds.), *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 2010), pp. 291–298.

<sup>31</sup> Ferdinand Widmann, SJ, *Morgenstern bei der Sonne. Der Kaiser mit Gott* (Vienna, 1705).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.

episode quoted by earlier Catholic apologists of the dynasty, from Vernulaeus to Weingarten.<sup>33</sup> More suggestions of religious toleration followed shortly thereafter, and here finally Widmann transforms his image of the stoical Catholic emperor into the image of a zealot, ready, if necessary, to shed blood in the defence of his faith:

Man konnte glauben/ das Begehren die Glaubens-Freyheit zuzulassen/ sey nur in nicht ganz Catholischen Orthen angemasset worden von nicht Catholischen Häubtern. Aber auch in folgenden 1665. Jahr zu Wien/ in geheimben Rath/ von Catholischen Ministern glaubten etwelche/ man könnte denen Uncatholischen durch die Finger sehen/ dem zu Regensburg gemachten Begehren nachgeben/ obschon zum Schimpff Catholischer Religion. Aber LEOPOLD auf die Felß der Kirch gegründet/ von der Sonn unabgesonderter Stern/ hat mit Schamröthe deren lauen Räthen/ und Trost deren besser-vermeinten Catholischen seine vorige Wort: Land und Reich eh zu verlassen/ Bluth eh zu vergiessen/ als mit Glaubens-Verlust dem Begehren beyzufallen/ wiederhollet.<sup>34</sup>

Further examples of Leopold's piety from Widmann's sermon all more or less adhere to the same pattern: he is shown to forbid the exercise of non-Catholic religious rites in hospitals intended for wounded soldiers in Hungary ('through which almost all of them died Catholic'), and to buy off plots of land in Silesia in order to avoid the construction of a Protestant church on that ground.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to this and similar strictly black-and-white pictures of a fervently Catholic reign,<sup>36</sup> Rinck has to take great care to construct a more Protestant-friendly or at least neutral image of the monarch. Thus, fairly early in his narrative, when he comes to describe the role of Jesuits in the future emperor's upbringing, he takes care to refute the rumour that Leopold was himself a secret Jesuit and was therefore always obliged to obey the General of the Society of Jesus. Those who say so, Rinck points out, know little of the Catholic religion—one can subscribe to some spiritual or religious observances of an order without having to follow the rest of its regulations.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Weingarten, *Richter-Spiegel*, p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> Widmann, *Morgenstern bei der Sonne* (see n. 31), n.p.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>36</sup> Another example of the same style of rhetoric can be found in the Spanish-language biography of Leopold I—*Admirables efectos de la Providencia... en la vida e imperio de Leopoldo Primero* (Milan, 1696).

<sup>37</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds... Leben* (see n. 4), I, p. 81.

More difficult to deflect were the accusations of cruelty and Catholic repressions, provoked by the emperor's policies in Hungary. Here, Rinck's strategy is once again based on a basic admission of incompetence:

It is obvious, that he never knew himself, how strongly people were constrained (*gepeiniget*) to take another faith, to which God himself forces no one, though he could do it better than all men. How can one then blame the emperor for those excesses, which should be ascribed to the harshness of General Caraffa, and not to his own commands? This minister, together with the Cardinal Collonitsch, have alone carried this reform in such a horrible form; the last did it out of zeal for religion, the first out of zeal for the treasury, and for his own purse. When [private] interest sets out to proceed with such rigour, it is impossible to avoid, that a veritable monster should spring out of it.<sup>38</sup>

This mixture of zealotry and selfish motives ascribed to the ministers effectively leaves the emperor out of the blaming strategy, and another statement of his oversight/incompetence brilliantly serves the purpose of exculpating him from further blame for the sorry state of Hungarian Protestants' affairs.

A twofold image of Leopold's relations with religion emerges as the result of Rinck's rhetorical efforts. The emperor is, on the one hand, a pious Christian relying on God in times of trouble and receiving victories in return. This far, the message of Rinck's biography is similar to that of the most fervent Catholic apologists. On the other hand, however, Rinck's emperor, unlike Widmann's emperor, is not a Catholic zealot. The persecution of Protestants in his lands is a tragic example of mismanagement.

*The Second Strategy: Competence through Education and Cultural Pursuits*

It would be wrong to subsume all lines of argument in Rinck's history of Leopold I under the argument of (relative) incompetence, which is either vindicated by faith or used to exculpate the monarch from moral blame for the actions of his servants. While this rhetorical strategy is, indeed, central to the way Leopold's failings are treated by Rinck, there is also another strategy employed throughout the book—that of presenting the emperor in favourable light in fields not directly connected to government. While the general praises of art patronage, learning and personal affability are

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 176–7.

inevitably important for the positive characterisation of a European monarch at least since the Renaissance (in fact references to learning had considerable currency already in medieval royal biographies),<sup>39</sup> the particular way in which Rinck presents Leopold's accomplishments in these areas is less archetypal. His portrayal of the emperor as a learned and art-loving monarch is ultimately subordinated to his image of Leopold as a morally competent ruler, though his attempts to construct that image are often bogged up in everyday details and a gossipy style of narration.

The essentially modern idea of political competence divorced from the direct tutelage of the Church is presented by Rinck in the baroque garb made up of antiquarian miscellanea. Rinck's approach to his subject matter is much less 'political' than that of Gualdo Priorato. Instead of going into the details of European politics at the time when the emperor enters the scene, like Priorato does, Rinck does not shrink from relating many anecdotal details of Leopold's childhood—e.g. his legendary meeting with the Turkish ambassador who had a foreboding that the child will cause great grief to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>40</sup> The part of the biography dealing with the circumstances of Leopold's birth bears evidence to Rinck's personal interest in numismatics and astrology, and does not in the least resemble Priorato's concern with the political situation of Europe during the period. Rinck brings his own numismatic passion into the book, describing for example a medal celebrating the place and time of Leopold's birth, with all the astrological implications thereof.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, he dedicates three and a half pages to the hour of Leopold's birth, and further three and a half pages to various signs at the time of his birth, while only two pages are dedicated to the political state of Europe at that time.<sup>42</sup> Even a tuft of hair on little Leopold's head is made much of—it reminds of a Hungarian hairstyle, 'and indeed this king of Hungary achieved more than all previous kings—for he achieved for himself true sovereignty (for lack of a precisely corresponding German concept, Rinck uses the word *souveraineté*) in Hungary and made it truly hereditary for his line'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For praises of learning and personal affability of the monarch in a late medieval biography, see, e.g., Christine de Pisan's praise for King Charles V of France, *Livre des faits et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* (Paris, 1940).

<sup>40</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds ... Leben* (see n. 4), I, pp. 34–5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25–7.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28–33.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.



This abundance of detail (for the most part irrelevant to the political implications of Leopold's reign, or made relevant by Rinck in a very far-fetched fashion) should not obscure the emphasis on virtue and merit that makes the core of Rinck's narrative also in the passages concerning his protagonist's childhood. Leopold's education and the characters of his educators are described in a way stressing the necessity of political experience (hence the praises of his father's decision to devote some time personally to Leopold's upbringing).<sup>44</sup> Considerable importance is accorded also to the dynastic tradition, reflected in the Habsburg handbook to government, *Princeps in Compendio*. Rinck inserts its German translation in full in his narrative of the emperor's education,<sup>45</sup> gliding over the fact that the guidelines to princely government presented in *Princeps in Compendio* are typically Catholic and of clearly Counter-Reformation origins.

Since proving his protagonist's moral superiority over his French rival is one of the tasks that Rinck sets himself from the start, it is interesting to see what becomes of his striving to acquit Leopold as a beneficent and ultimately successful monarch when it comes to rivalry outside the political and military sphere. The lack of spectacular achievements in the field of patronage of fine arts and learning makes favourable comparison to Louis XIV (always looming in the background due to the discursive framework initially set by Rinck) somewhat problematic. To circumvent this difficulty, new justification strategies are adopted, as in the passage following the remark made by a foreign traveller in Vienna that Leopold was '*un Apollo senza Parnasso*':

But in a court that is full of businessmen (*Negotianten*) nobody has time to think of scholarship, which is best left to more peaceful places. Germany under his rule has gained in learning, and his sacred guardianship has been the root of more than one Parnassus, so that one can call him an *Apollo di molti Parnassi*. Because exactly under his government so many universities and places sacred to the Muses have been either established or brought to a new perfection.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 36–42.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 44–74. On *Princeps in compendio*, see Franz Bosbach (ed.), 'Princeps in compendio', in: Konrad Repgen (ed.), *Das Herrscherbild im 17. Jahrhundert* (Münster, 1991), pp. 79–114; Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca*, pp. 9–11; Oswald Redlich, 'Princeps in compendio...', in *Monatsblatt des Vereins f. Landeskunde von Niederösterreich*, 3, 5 (1906), pp. 105–24.

<sup>46</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds... Leben* (see n. 4), I, p. 111.



The compensatory rhetorical strategy employed by Rinck at this point proceeds from admitting the lack of a centralised, imperially directed cultural flourishing in Vienna, and then sets forth to make a virtue out of necessity by pointing to the de-centralised flourishing of arts and learning in Germany as a whole. It is, thus, rather by the general benevolent impact on the situation in letters and learning throughout the German lands, than by the particular patronage of the arts in Vienna that Rinck invites his reader's to judge Leopold's achievements. The shift of emphasis is borne out by examples. To illustrate his point, Rinck mentions the universities of Kiel and Innsbruck, the improved situation of Halle and Altdorf, and the increased number of universities and colleges in Silesia.<sup>47</sup>

The lack of spectacular art patronage is also compensated in Rinck's text by references to the emperor's many learned hobbies, such as reading and alchemy (a standard element in the image of a learned prince throughout the late Middle Ages and beyond, by no means regarded as theologically suspect).<sup>48</sup>

Rinck's praises of Leopold's love of reading are not abstract—they show the goals to which the emperor's learned interests were directed. The interest in reading is conceived of as consisting of two elements: enlarging and improving the state of the imperial library with the assistance of the imperial librarian Lambecius,<sup>49</sup> and reading per se. Among the few books that Rinck chooses to mention as Leopold's preferred reading was a work on Christian martyrs, but also *Representatio majestatis imperatoriae* by imperial councillor Mulz,<sup>50</sup> 'which he held in such high esteem, that he would always open it when occasion arose'.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the rhetorical cycle that began with describing the ruler's virtuous upbringing that equipped him for government and for cultural pursuits is closed by showing that cultural pursuits, in their turn, were ultimately directed at maintaining his piety and his government. To be morally competent, a prince had to maintain a lively interest in things that help him to uphold his competence, both moral and political.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 111–112.

<sup>48</sup> Jan R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France* (Leiden, 1998), p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds... Leben* (see n. 4), I, pp. 97–104.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob Bernhard Mulz, *Representatio Majestatis imperatoriae per singula ejus jura ex actis publicis*, (Oettingen, 1690).

<sup>51</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds... Leben* (see n. 4), I, p. 97.

*Competence and the Secular Nature of Politics*

However loftily Rinck praises the traditional Habsburg upbringing of his protagonist, based on the virtues summarised in *Princeps in Compendio*, a crucial difference exists between the model of political competence represented by the Habsburg handbook on government and the model that Rinck himself constructs. *Princeps in Compendio*, a mirror of princes written in the 1630ies for the future Ferdinand III, is an example of the anti-Machiavellian rejection of a separation between the spheres of politics and religion central to the Catholic, Counter-Reformation idea of government.<sup>52</sup> Rinck's vision of virtuous government, on the other hand, is firmly grounded if not in the complete separation of the political and religious spheres, then at least in the firm separation of piety (seen as a desirable quality in a monarch) and religious confessionality. As a conscientious ruler with a proper upbringing, Rinck's emperor is morally competent himself and has no need to subject his policies to the guidance of a single Church in order to rule virtuously. Indeed, his moral competence is such that it supercedes the many shortcomings of his administration and never fails to render him victorious.

It is important at this stage to remember that Rinck was, after all, a student of Christian Thomasius. For Thomasius, sovereignty is a secular institution, not springing directly from God's will, but only a mediated expression of this will.<sup>53</sup> This understanding of politics is far from the model constructed in the first half of the seventeenth century by the 'organic intellectuals' that served the House of Austria during the Counter-Reformation era, the Flemings Vernulaeus and Lamormaini. It is, ironically, much closer to the model of political competence created by other Flemish intellectuals two hundred years earlier, for the dynasty's Burgundian predecessors. Thomasius's understanding of the nature of sovereignty is essentially modern, but it resembles an earlier model developed by the Burgundian theorists of the state. As a result of a creative appropriation of a number of works of classical and medieval political theory and history, the Burgundian model ascribed a particular *vertu de humanité* to the prince in managing the affairs of the *chose publique*

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<sup>52</sup> See Bosbach (ed.), 'Princeps in compendio' (see n. 45), and Goloubeva, *Glorification of Emperor Leopold I*, pp. 37–8. On anti-Machiavellism in this context, see Robert Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince* (see Ch. III, n. 49).

<sup>53</sup> Martin Kühnel, *Das politische Denken von Christian Thomasius* (see n. 1), p. 92.

without the supervision of the Church.<sup>54</sup> One could claim, proceeding from the vision of harmonious government described by the Burgundian chancellor Hugonet, that *vertu de humanité* stands for nothing other but moral competence of the prince. In Hugonet's vision, fulfilment and abundance are possible under human government, provided that the form of government is right and the ruling prince is competent (*saige*).<sup>55</sup> This distinctly non-Augustinian optimistic view of history is shared also by Rinck with his vision of the flourishing Germany protected and cherished by a virtuous Habsburg emperor.

Another striking similarity between the views of Thomasius and Rinck can be seen in the treatment of the duties and obligations of the subjects. Thomasius does not recognise the right of subjects to oppose an unjust sovereign—however, if the sovereign goes so far as to infringe their freedom of conscience, they are not obliged to follow his commands, but to suffer patiently. Some may emigrate, as a last legitimate refuge.<sup>56</sup> Rinck adopts a similar stance when speaking of the persecutions of the Protestants in Hungary. Their misfortunes, he claims, were not of the emperor's making. When Louis XIV persecuted the Protestants in his kingdom, 'they said that the harshness of persecution came not from his own orders, though it is known in all Europe, that nothing in his kingdom is done without his command'. How much more true should the excuse be for the emperor, whose power did not equal that of the French king, argues Rinck. The cruelty of persecution in Leopold's lands surely came from the excesses of his ministers.<sup>57</sup> Besides, the Evangelical Protestants in Hungary, according to Rinck, had contributed much to their misfortunes by their '*hitzigen Verfahren*' (hot-headed actions). 'This nation,' he claims, writing of the Hungarians, 'is much given to hot-headed passions. This can be attributed to both Catholics and Protestants, and so one can conclude that both sides have made similar mistakes'.<sup>58</sup> Through this rhetoric, the persecution of Hungarian Protestants ceases to be the result of misdeemeanour on behalf of the emperor, and becomes an internal conflict of the 'hot-headed' Hungarian nation—it neither adds to nor detracts from

<sup>54</sup> Arjo Vanderjagt, 'Expropriating the past' (see Ch. I, n. 14), esp. pp. 191–4.

<sup>55</sup> 'Proposition faite a Brouxelles par le Chancelier de Bourgogne messire Guillaume Hugonet, en presence du duc Charles, pour avoir 600 mille escus', in: J. Cuvelier (ed.), *Actes des Etats Généraux des anciens Pays-Bas* (see Ch. I, n. 26).

<sup>56</sup> Kühnel, *Das politische Denken von Christian Thomasius* (see n. 1), p. 88.

<sup>57</sup> Rinck, *Leopolds... Leben* (see n. 4), I, p. 177.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

the prince's character and his rule, but places the blame for the persecutions at the door of the cultural Other.

This brings us back to an essential feature of Rinck's work noted already by Anna Coreth: the emphasis on common political interests within the Empire.<sup>59</sup> The Hungarians as a violent, hot-blooded Other, as well as the French king with his all-pervasive but morally suspect control of the political institutions, serve as a background for constructing the image of a virtuous German ruler, whose moral competence is divorced from the control of the Catholic Church. He is no Jesuit, Rinck is at pains to prove, but a worthy leader whose image Rinck projects for the confessionally diverse German audience. Coming at the height of the War of the Spanish Succession, this message offers direct ideological benefits both for the dynasty and for its Protestant German allies.

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Outside this direct political context, however, Rinck's biography can serve as an example of another important trend. Already the history of Leopold's reign published by Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato in the 1670s distances itself from the previous model of statecraft directed primarily at maintaining the Catholic religion. To be sure, Priorato puts the blame for the many conflicts that ensued in Germany after the Reformation at the Protestant princes' door, however, he does not forget to blame also the excessively worldly ambitions of some prelates.<sup>60</sup> His business, however, is not with resolving confessional conflicts, but with describing the sophisticated interplay of political interests where previous Habsburg historiographers had seen mostly a struggle against the forces of heresy for the one true Church. In this sense, he re-invents politics in the Habsburg historiography—if by politics we are to understand a struggle of pragmatic interests informed by the personal motives and passions of the major actors.<sup>61</sup> Rinck writes within a different tradition and his understanding of the political sphere is perhaps more moralistic than that of Priorato—nevertheless, he also, by the virtue of his non-confessional approach to Habsburg history, reinforces the secular model of political competence in the pro-imperial

<sup>59</sup> Anna Coreth, *Österreichische Geschichtsschreibung* (see n. 3), pp. 75–7.

<sup>60</sup> See e.g. Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *Historia di Ferdinando Terzo Imperatore* (Ch. IV, n. 10), esp. pp. 2–3 and 6.

<sup>61</sup> For a similar understanding of the 'invention' of politics in West European historiography, see the discussion of 'the political' in the memoirs of Philippe de Commines: Joel Balchard, *Commines l'Européen. L'invention du politique* (Geneva, 1996).

circles. The ensuing understanding of a ruler's duties and the qualities necessary for the successful performance of those duties is secular in the sense that it does not place service to the Catholic Church above all other tasks of government and does not envisage a guiding role for religious institutions in transferring the divine mandate to the rulers.

It appears that, having weathered the confessionalism of the sixteenth century and the Thirty Years' War, the Habsburg historiography around 1700 was discretely returning to a secular model of the ruler's political competence, smuggled through the back door—this time as a necessary prerequisite for political unity within the Empire.



## CONCLUSIONS

### THE RETURN OF SECULAR POLITICAL COMPETENCE

Historians of political ideas in the past have been prone to select a particular point in time or a particular writer and to declare that at that time, or in the works of that individual, the modern concept of politics came into being. If one follows the line of argument articulated by Isaiah Berlin, then the issue of political competence as a set of techniques or skills necessary to achieve political success, independent of the goals of Christian salvation, had been an invention of Machiavelli.<sup>1</sup> Closer to Burgundy, there have been attempts to attribute the 'invention of politics' in the modern sense of the word to Philippe de Commines<sup>2</sup>—even though it is not clear why exactly his vision of power struggles, reflected in rough sketches of the psychology of rulers, should be considered more 'political' than the articulation of political demands by, say, the elites of Flemish cities of the same period.

The present study makes no claims as to the particular time when a secular understanding of political competence came into being. It argues only that a fairly secular model of political competence, closely linked to the medieval ideal of common good but leaving the issues of Christian faith on the margins, can be found in the official historiography of the dukes of Burgundy just before the dynastic union with the Habsburgs. This model relied to a great extent on three interrelated domains of competence. The first of these was military competence, that was commonly ascribed by official historians to the rulers and the nobility, but could occasionally be attributed to members of other groups and was essentially seen as capacity for maintaining peace and proper conditions for *bien publique*, but also for asserting one's rights (or those of one's sovereign or allies). The second was what this author chose to call institutional competence—the capacity to maintain justice but also to deal with the institutional complexity of the body politic, maintaining working relations

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli', in Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind* (ed. Henry Hardy, Roger Hausheer), (London and NY, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Joel Blanchard, Commines *L'Europeen: L'invention du politique*, (Publications Romanes et Francaises, number 216), (Geneva, 1996).

with various regional institutions and those social groups that had a corporate/ political identity. The third competence, closely connected to the second, was discursive—the ability to articulate the claims on the basis of which one negotiated with various corporate bodies, waged war or concluded treaties. The terms used by contemporaries for each of these competences were different from the ones I use here, and examples of phrases denoting each of the respective domains of competence are given in Chapter I. Of the three domains of political competence, only the third—the discursive competence—was attributed by dynastic historians with some regularity to the members of the clergy. Military and institutional competence were essentially secular fields, in which matters of faith played no central role.

This model was partly transformed in the official histories of Maximilian I. While remaining equally secular, Maximilian's court historiography placed less value on the role of urban and regional elites and the need for the ruler to be expert at negotiating with them. At the same time, it retained the emphasis on military and discursive competence, albeit attributing both of those primarily to the ruler, and more seldom to other actors. Compared to the vision of politics in the work of Burgundian historians, the political field had shrunk, but remained secular.

At the time of the Reformation, the dynasty chose to embrace the confessional vision of politics articulated by Mercurino de Gattinara—which, in its turn, was a development of the vision of Christian politics proposed around 1500 by Erasmus. The confessional model of political competence transformed the dynasty's official historiography, placing confessional loyalty and the practice of Catholic piety above other skills such as the capacity to deal with regional political institutions. This model had a profound effect on the Habsburg ideology for the rest of the early modern period. It also shifted the emphasis of official historical narratives: if earlier court historians wrote at length of rulers' manipulations of the institutional complexities of the various lands that they happened to rule, now the narrative concentrated on their attempts to maintain the Catholic faith in those lands and to expand the power of the Catholic Church. Bidding adieu to the heritage of Italian civic humanism that privileged 'pagan' virtues and to the Burgundian tradition that rarely spoke of Christian virtues in political contexts, the new model of political competence was essentially about staunch religious partisanship. From an attribute that had been always mentioned but seldom discussed, Catholic devotion became a necessary and almost sufficient condition of discerning political



leadership. The many aspects of political astuteness that had been valued by the Burgundian historians and by Maximilian's troop of court intellectuals were either deflated or discarded.

Finally, in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War, the secular model began to make its covert and gradual return in works of official Habsburg historiography. This was a phenomenon not related to the beginning of the Enlightenment—indeed, the change predated the spreading of the ideas of early Enlightenment thinkers in the German-speaking lands. At first, imperial histories by Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato brought back the heritage of Italian civic humanism with a concomitant emphasis on military and secular *virtù*. Then, the influential history of the reign of Leopold I by Eucharius Gottlieb Rinck, while still emphasising the emperor's piety, downplayed the importance of the confessional stance in describing Leopold's accomplishments as beneficial for all Germans, independently of religious denomination. Rinck's denial of the predominantly confessional nature of Leopold's policies in Hungary, as well as his unwillingness to draw the connection between the dynasty's politics and the confessional state, may be a result of the influence of his teacher, Christian Thomasius. Thomasius's doctrine of the separation of secular authority and religion (reflected in his writings on the rights of the Protestant princes and on heresy) did not ascribe subjective rights of freedom of conscience to individuals. Instead, his teachings placed the prince—and hence the state—above religious disputes and viewed history from the perspective of emancipation of the state from the factionalism of the churches.<sup>3</sup> This made a non-confessional approach to dynastic history possible and, indeed, necessary.

Another important change that occurred in Habsburg dynastic historiography at the time when Rinck was its major representative in Germany, was the regaining of a certain critical stance, when not all actions of the ruler are presented as equally worthy of acclaim. This stance had been present in Burgundian court historiography before 1500, but was subsequently lost during the years when rulers were presented by official historians predominantly as defenders of the right religious doctrine. Rinck's dry analysis of some of the failings of Leopold I and his administrators reinvents the secular model of dynastic political competence and endows

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<sup>3</sup> See Ian Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State. The Political Thought of Christian Thomasius* (Cambridge, 2008).

it with a depth and complexity that had been largely lost over the years when the confessional model reigned supreme.

Two sets of conclusions can be drawn from this study. The first concerns the validity of official histories as sources for history of ideas; the second is more general and addressed to all readers interested in issues of secular political thinking.

I. The texts analysed in this study almost without exception provide rich descriptions of institutional and social contexts of political action (this is less true about the literary-fictional setting of *Weisskunig* and the Latin erudite style of Vernulaeus). This confirms the assumption, expressed in the Introduction to this book, that court historians' attachment to institutional narratives provides context for a better understanding of the political ideas of their time, including the ideas of political success or failure. While it may be true that institutions tend to perpetuate the discourse that provides the rationale for their existence, and their propensity to reproduce old ideas may be greater than their capacity to generate new ones, this is not necessarily so in all cases. There is no reason to regard the messages that 'institutional' actors such as Chastelain and Molinet wished to communicate to the world, as less 'political' than the message that Philippe de Commines was anxious to present in his quest for self-justification. An individual memoirist could at times discard local and historical contexts of political action when he wished to make a point—as Philippe de Commines often did. Substituting an early attempt at individual psychology for an *ad populum* argumentation framework may have been a novel thing at the time of Commines, but it should not obscure from us the fact that the 'backward' corporate political actors (and their official historians) articulated the local, regional and dynastic interests of their milieu in greater detail and provided a richer context for investigation of their society's ideas of success and failure.

II. The second, and more important conclusion of this study concerns the relation between secular political discourse and the development of political culture. The definition of politics at the basis of the analytical framework of this study is modern, which is to say that this study looks at late medieval and early modern normative models through the eyes of modern political theory. The resulting interpretation is therefore, in a sense, anachronistic: instead of assuming that the purpose of government in the year 1470 was justice, equity and common good, or that in 1600 good government was about the preservation of true religion, this study strives to locate, in the sources of the period, the elements of political competence that go beyond these generic ideological constructs. It is exactly in

such terms that this study approaches the notion of secularity of political competence. While a fifteenth-century historian attributing salutary competence in the affairs of the commonwealth to a prince, or to the cooperation of the prince and the Estates (and not to the guidance of the Church), would not have called this attitude 'secular', we can certainly label it as secular by comparison with later notions of confessional politics.

The analysis of successive models of political competence in this study can thus be viewed as a prolonged passage from a fairly secular understanding of what is needed to achieve political success to a distinctly confessional or church-dominated idea of political astuteness and then back again, to a new understanding of political competence that is above confessional rancour. The amplitude of philosophical convictions that hides beneath this sequence is breathtaking. If around 1500 (before Erasmus articulated his ideas on the education of the Christian prince) one sees a relative separation of the goals of political action from personal religious motives (assumed as universally seeking Christian salvation), then around 1530 and up to the 1650s the texts of dynastic historians demonstrate total subordination of political action to religious convictions. Finally, some time after the Thirty Years' War, one begins to see a gradual separation of the quest for successful policy from the quest for transcendental truth. The complexity of this development makes it impossible to subsume the evolution of political thinking between c. 1500 and today as a passage from 'transcendental' or based on religious belief to 'immanent' or secular as Charles Taylor has famously claimed in *A Secular Age*.<sup>4</sup> Quite obviously, there is more to the story of transformation of political imagination of Western Europeans from the late Middle Ages to modernity and beyond than a mere shedding of 'enchanted' worldview that had supposedly dominated the minds of pre-modern individuals and made them connect all consequences (including political ones) to transcendental causes.

To begin with, even if the large-scale warp of political history was still viewed as reflecting divine will (both La Marche and Commynes attributed the fall of Charles the Bold to God's will, albeit with very different messages), that does not imply that religion entered into consideration when describing how various actors chose their political options. When it did (in the texts analysed here, mostly from Erasmus onwards), the introduction of religious arguments was a change, an innovation caused by the need to legitimise political struggles with the adherents of an opposing

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (New York, 2007).

religious faction. Before and around 1500, the narratives of politics shaped by political institutions such as the court of Burgundy and later the court of Maximilian I were not predominantly concerned with the upholding of religious truth. Those were narratives of interacting dynastic and local interests, occasionally embellished with far-fetched calls for Christian unity and crusade that hardly materialised in political action. The confessionalised version of Christian political institutions that developed from around the 1520s onwards distorted many of the premises of politics as interaction of local or regional interests, placing a disproportionate amount of influence and responsibility with the prince as the guarantor of confessional soundness of every policy. In the German-speaking lands, where the limitations of confessional politics were more obvious due to the close proximity of alternative ultimate truths, the plea for secularising the early modern state came not from philosophers insisting on freedom of conscience, but from jurists insisting that the prince stay aloof from the factionalism of churches. This may have well been the beginning of the stance that Charles Taylor describes as the state 'controlling religion', implying that religion as such is something intrinsically dangerous for the modern state.

Because the Western experience of the state controlling religion obviously has its faults, the current academic consensus seems to be that contemporary societies, faced with the need to recognise religious diversity, have little more to learn from the West European story of secularisation.<sup>5</sup> This consensus, however, is built on the premise that the history of secularisation in the West is by and large post-Enlightenment, and that Enlightenment has played the central role in separating the state from the church. There is nevertheless at least one more useful lesson to be learned from pre-modern Europe, which does not figure large in the current debates about secularism and the secular state.

That lesson is to be found in the devastating effect that fierce confessional agenda apparently has had on the models of political competence that had already developed by 1500 in Western Europe, exemplified in this study by the Burgundian Netherlands. Let us return for a moment to Arjo Vanderjagt's definition of the secular state before 1500: 'The state is secular in the first place and in practice, because in contrast to the spiritual

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<sup>5</sup> This opinion was articulated, for instance, in the discussion organised by the Institute for Human Sciences between Charles Taylor, Saskia Sassen, Rajeev Bhargava and Shlomo Avineri in Vienna in June 2009.

*civitas Dei* it is primarily material and not at all concerned with the internal religious qualities which men might have. Its task is to protect and to help men in their external practical affairs regardless of their internal belief and desires.<sup>6</sup> The competences that were required for running such a state, or for participating in its affairs, were manifold but did not primarily include the ability to discern true religion from false (this was left to the Church). Instead, institutional and discursive skills necessary in order to negotiate with multiple corporate actors—such as dynasties, cities and Estates—were deemed crucial in the political field. This *de facto* separation of politics and religion ended not with a further development of the constituent parts of secular political competence (military, institutional and discursive abilities necessary for running the polity), but in the superimposition of a different model that claimed that ability to discern true religion from false was exactly the central ability necessary for successful statecraft. The new confessional model was perhaps most concisely expressed by the words of Charles V bidding adieu to his Netherlandish subjects: ‘should heresy enter also the bounds of your land, do not hesitate to extinguish it, or it will go ill for you’. This is no complementary model that would leave the previous requirements for political success intact by merely adding another one, a ‘confessional competence’. On the contrary, the insistence that religious identity is essential to political integrity (one cannot be a heretic and a good member of the political community at the same time), leaves virtually no place for nuanced judgements of other facets of political competence. For Gattinara and Vernulaeus, the two poles of confessional Habsburg historiography separated by a century, no combination of other skills (be they discursive, military or institutional) could substitute for a sound sense of true faith. The emphasis on the soundness of doctrine devalued the skills necessary for institutional bargaining between various corporate actors making up the polity.

Cultural historians have sometimes stressed the transforming and often detrimental effect that the rise of the confessional state had on spirituality of the different branches of Christian religion, but perhaps in view of the predominantly political face of the current debate on secularism, it is much more important to remember that confessionalism, or the mingling of political and religious motives, impoverished political discourses and thus hampered the development of political culture.

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<sup>6</sup> Arjo Vanderjagt, *Qui sa vertu anoblist* (see Chapter I, n. 15).



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